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HISTORY OF  
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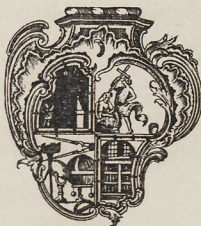


FOUNDED 1754

HISTORY OF  
THE NEW YORK SOCIETY  
LIBRARY

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER ON LIBRARIES  
IN COLONIAL NEW YORK, 1698-1776

COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY  
AUSTIN BAXTER KEEP, A.M.



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<sup>1</sup> Died August 9, 1908



## PREFACE

UPON the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the New York Society Library, in the spring of 1904, its Board of Trustees decided that the event would be best signalized by the issuance of a volume commemorative of the history of the institution. Accordingly Messrs. George V. N. Baldwin, Beverly Chew and Henry C. Swords were appointed a Publication Committee, to which Frederic de P. Foster was later added in place of Mr. Baldwin, deceased. The preparation of the proposed work was entrusted to Austin Baxter Keep, A.M., an alumnus of Amherst College, formerly instructor in history at Adelphi Academy, Brooklyn, and at the time holding a graduate scholarship in American history at Columbia University. He was then also engaged in editing the English-colonial manuscript "Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675-1776," an eight-volume work published by the city authorities. Owing to the exactions of these prior engagements in addition to the magnitude of the present task, which has involved much research both in this country and abroad, the projected volume has been thus long in the making.

The main purpose of this book is to set forth conditions attending the establishment of the Society Library and successive episodes of its first century-and-a-half of existence, together with brief characterizations of its long array of Trustees, primarily for the benefit of its members and management, now and for all time to come. But it is also felt that many will be interested to trace the mutations and advance of Library science in various phases through this record of the progress of a single institution for so long a period.

It is expected, furthermore, that citizens of New York will find profitable entertainment in this fresh insight into the literary activities and interests of many a notable personage iden-

tified with our civic past. By far the oldest Library in the State of New York and one of the earliest literary organizations of the country, dating from colonial times with incorporation by royal letters patent in the reign of King George the Third, the Society Library, during its extended career of public usefulness and through its imposing membership roll, has yielded its share toward the growth and influence of our great metropolis.

We are confident, moreover, that this work should interest the student of general history as well, for it tells the story of early attempts toward advancement in culture and social betterment in this country. In confirmation of this belief, it is a pleasure to state that the introduction and first three chapters of the book, under title of "The Library in Colonial New York," have been approved by the faculty of political science in Columbia University as the dissertation required of Mr. Keep for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Although the planning, the investigation and the composition involved in the preparation of the book have been wholly the work of its author, there are not a few to whom cordial acknowledgments are due for personal reminiscence, critical assistance, generous disposal of treasured information, and above all for sympathetic interest. In hearty appreciation, therefore, are recorded these names: Mr. Worthington C. Ford of the Library of Congress; Director J. Franklin Jameson, LL.D., and Miss Frances G. Davenport of the department of historical research of the Carnegie Institution, Washington; Professor Herbert L. Osgood, LL.D., Supervisor Frederic W. Erb of the Loan Division, Secretary Frederick P. Keppel and former Registrar Rudolf Tombo, Jr., Ph.D., of Columbia University; the late Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, Rector, Mr. Hermann H. Cammann, Comptroller, and Chief Clerk W. F. L. Aigeltinger and Mr. Charles L. Foster of the clerical staff of Trinity Parish; the Rev. Dr. Howard Duffield, Pastor, Colonel Charles H. Olmstead, Clerk of the Session, and Treasurer James Henry of the First Presbyterian Church; Messrs. John S. Bussing, Elder, and Charles S. Phillips, Clerk, of the Collegiate Dutch Church; Librarians Wilberforce Eames of the Lenox Branch of the New York Public Library, A. J. van Laer of the State Library at



Albany, Charles K. Bolton of the Boston Athenæum, James G. Barnwell of the Library Company of Philadelphia, Ellen M. FitzSimons of the Charleston (S. C.) Library Society, Bernard C. Steiner, Ph.D., of the Enoch Pratt Free Library and Lawrence C. Wroth of the Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore, Frank B. Bigelow, Wentworth S. Butler and the staff of the New York Society Library, Edward H. Virgin of the General Theological Seminary, Mrs. Florence E. Youngs of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, Robert H. Kelby and Assistants William A. Hildebrand and Alexander J. Wohlgagen of the New York Historical Society, William Nelson of the New Jersey Historical Society, Albert C. Bates of the Connecticut Historical Society, Mabel L. Webber of the South Carolina Historical Society; the Librarians of the British Museum, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Aberdeen Universities, Lambeth and Fulham Palaces, Sion College, Dr. Bray's Associates, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London; the Rev. Sadler Phillips, Vicar of St. Etheldreda, Fulham Palace Gates, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, the Hon. John Bigelow, Mr. and Mrs. John Austin Stevens, Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, Mrs. William H. Shankland, Miss Kate O. Petersen, the Rev. Dr. Edward T. Corwin, the Rev. Dr. Arthur Wentworth Eaton, the Rev. Shepherd Knapp, formerly of the Brick Presbyterian Church, Mr. Henry W. Kent of the Metropolitan Museum and Newel Perry, Ph.D., besides other personal friends of the author.

Especial indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to James H. Canfield, LL.D., Librarian of Columbia University, for reading first proofs of the text, in addition to other assistance; to State Historian Victor H. Paltsits for contributions and critical comments; to the Rev. Joseph Hooper of Durham, Conn., for valuable aid and constant interest; to Mr. John R. Todd, to whose photographic skill and gratuitous services the admirable character of much of the illustrative material is due; to Arthur P. Monger, R.A., photographer, of London, for the personal attention and excellent results that have marked his reproductions of ancient manuscripts and title-pages; to Mr. William Dickinson Keep, whose antiquarian interest and fraternal regard have made possible the great number of quotations and data from



repositories in the United Kingdom; to the Vestry of Trinity Parish for the contribution of text illustrations bearing on its early Library; to Mr. John B. Pine, Clerk of the Board of Trustees of Columbia University, for the loan of several full-page cuts, and particularly for his generous donation of the illustrations of the section on King's College Library; and to Mr. Philip H. Waddell Smith of Pittsburgh for contributing the portrait of his great-great-great-grandmother, Mrs. Anne Waddell, and the facsimile of a certificate of membership originally acquired by her husband, Captain John Waddell, in 1754, the very year of the Library's foundation.

The index has been prepared by Mr. Charles Alexander Nelson, Reference Librarian of Columbia University.

The book contains likenesses of a few of the men who as Trustees have served the Library with devotion and success. It is a matter of regret that, because of the insufficiency of funds available for the purpose, portraits of many other Trustees, illustrious in their day and generation, have necessarily been omitted.

These prefatorial remarks cannot be concluded without at least a brief allusion to the passing of the late Chairman of this Committee, George Van Nest Baldwin. He it was who in the first instance proposed the writing of the volume now completed. He read the history chapter by chapter with critical care and enthusiasm, believing the book would redound to the credit of the institution he so deeply cherished. His death occurring just as the manuscript went to the printers, this book will ever be intimately associated with the memory of his faithful services as a Trustee of the New York Society Library.

BEVERLY CHEW

HENRY COTHEAL SWORDS

FREDERIC DE PEYSTER FOSTER

} *Committee.*

## INTRODUCTION

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THE LIBRARY IN COLONIAL NEW YORK  
1698-1776



## INTRODUCTION

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### THE LIBRARY IN COLONIAL NEW YORK

1698-1776

**I**N these days of exploration into all realms of achievement and knowledge, there is no field more proper for research than that of early Library development in America. So marked have been advances in Library science within recent years, and so increasingly bright and so boundless is its prospect, that there is all the greater reason for studying the beginnings and early days of the movement. The subject is inviting and full of promise, none the less that its sources are scattered and difficult of access. But this dauntless age of inquiry demands correct and full information concerning the establishment of our oldest Libraries. With reverent curiosity it also seeks intelligence of earlier endeavors and of short-lived institutions that fell by the wayside, leaving scarce a trace to-day. It is in this spirit that the present study has been made of conditions in Colonial New York.

Present-day investigations are commonly expected to abound in revelations, to set forth an array of revolutionary statistics, to throw down and grind to powder



the tablets of engraven belief. Only to a local and not at all damaging extent, however, will such expectation be realized in this portion of Library research. Its disclosures will occasion uneasiness to none of those commonwealths or communities that cherish landmarks along the Library way. Nothing has been discovered that can possibly ruffle their placid contentment. So far as New York is concerned, Virginia may forever point to its Indian massacre of 1622 as the fell destroyer of the earliest College Library in the new world.<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts may abide in serene satisfaction over the bequest of John Harvard's books in 1638 to the institution that bears his name as our oldest university to-day; while Boston justly glories in having had a "publike Library" in its town house before the year 1675.<sup>2</sup>

Nor is there the least disposition on the part of New York to challenge either the statement of South Carolina's historian, that "there can be little doubt that the first library in America to be supported in any degree at the public expense was that at Charlestown in 1698;"<sup>3</sup> or the equally convincing assertions of Maryland's champion, that the Bray "provincial library," sent thither in 1697, was "probably the first free circulating library in the United States,"<sup>4</sup> and that Governor Nicholson's suggestion of the same year, that the assembly make provision for its maintenance and increase, was "the first recommendation by any public official, that a part of

<sup>1</sup> The "Colledge at Henrico," founded in 1620. Horace E. Scudder. "Public Libraries a Hundred Years Ago," chap. i in *Public Libraries in the U. S.* Washington, 1876. Pp. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Charles K. Bolton in *The Influence and History of the Boston Athenæum*. Boston, 1907. P. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Edward McCrady. *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government*. New York, 1899. P. 508.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard C. Steiner. "Rev. Thomas Bray and his American Libraries." *The American Historical Review*. New York, 1897. Vol. II, p. 73.



the public funds be applied to the support of a free public library.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, in the chronological procession of institutions of later foundation, existing and prosperous today,—the Library Company of Philadelphia, dating from 1731, the Company of the Redwood Library, instituted at Newport, R. I., in 1747, and the Charles-Town (Charleston, S. C.) Library Society, established in 1748,—the New York Society Library, founded in 1754, cheerfully takes fourth place, thereby surrendering its long-asserted claim to have dated from the year 1700. This act is none the less gracious,—even though the question of precedence has never been seriously agitated by sister institutions,—for the present investigation has been conducted in the name of the Society Library, now become sponsor for the truth.

First, therefore, it may be well to quote in full the latest and supposably the most nearly authentic account of Library beginnings in New York, that has been printed prior to the preparation of this monograph. It reads interestingly as follows, in a chapter entitled “The City under Governor John Montgomerie, 1728–1732,” by the Rev. Daniel Van Pelt in the “Memorial History,” published in 1892:

In September, 1728, Governor Montgomerie received word that the private library of an English clergyman, the Rev. John Millington, had been bequeathed by him to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; and that the society—something like our present church boards of foreign missions, and evidently regarding New-York as included within its range of operations among the heathen—had decided to bestow Mr. Millington’s gift of books upon the corporation of our city.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

## 6 THE LIBRARY IN COLONIAL NEW YORK

There were a little over 1600 of them, a fair number for a private library, but rather a modest beginning for a municipal one. Naturally the prevailing character was theological or devotional, though doubtless the "Wits of Queen Anne's Time"—Pope, Addison, Steele, Swift—found a place among them. These volumes, moreover, were not the first donation of this kind: a smaller collection, also formerly the private library of a clergyman, was already in the possession of the city. This had been presented in 1700 by the Rev. John Sharp, Lord Bellomont's chaplain in the fort. As this gentleman was still living, the authorities now gave into his charge the library as thus materially increased, quarters were assigned for it in the City Hall, and here access to it was given to the public at large. Mr. Sharp, however, being an aged man, did not long survive his appointment; and after his death no one was found either able or willing to take his place. Hence the City Library fell into sad neglect, until it was transferred to the keeping of the Society Library, organized in 1754, becoming thus the nucleus of the institution that still exists and flourishes in this city to-day.<sup>1</sup>

And later in the same work, in a section devoted to the history of the Society Library, appears the following paragraph, authorized by that institution as its understanding of how the Library movement in New York originated:

The History of the New-York Society Library begins in the year 1700. At that time "The Public Library" of New-York was founded during the administration of the Earl of Bellomont (Grahame's "History of the United States," Vol. II, p. 256). The library thus organized appears to have gone on increasing, and to have acquired considerable importance. Several folio volumes—now in the possession of the Society Library—were presented by friends in London in 1712; and in 1729 the Rev. Dr. Millington, rector of Newington, England, bequeathed his

<sup>1</sup>*The Memorial History of the City of New-York.* Edited by James Grant Wilson. New York, 1892. Vol. II, p. 194. Statements in this extract form the basis of the

article on early Libraries in New York, in Ainsworth R. Spofford's *A Book for All Readers.* New York, 1900. Pp. 297-298.

library to the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," and by this society it was presented to the Public Library of New-York. The whole collection of books was placed in charge of the corporation of the city, and seems to have suffered from want of proper attention and management until the year 1754, when an association of individuals was formed for the purpose of carrying on such an institution more efficiently. On the application of these gentlemen [the contributor here by mistake gives the names of the Trustees who secured the charter in 1772], the books they had collected were incorporated with the Public Library, and the whole placed under the care of trustees chosen by them. The institution was known at that time as "The City Library," a name by which it was popularly designated up to about the year 1750 [1850].<sup>1</sup>

Without pausing to correct or even to point out inconsistencies and inaccuracies—not to mention anachronisms<sup>2</sup>—in these two extracts, which so well and fully represent all hitherto published knowledge of the subject, a beginning will at once be made to disclose the actual facts. How errors crept in and how much was forgotten in the passage of the indifferent years, and how, in the absence of any special study, misleading reports came to be accepted as fact, will all appear in succeeding pages as old traditions and fables are explained, and in their stead is unfolded the true story of the Library in Colonial New York.

<sup>1</sup> Wentworth S. Butler. "The New-York Society Library," in chap. iii, "The Libraries of New-York." *The Memorial History*. Vol. IV, p. 106. This extract is taken bodily, with but trifling changes, from an "Historical Notice" published in the Society Library Catalogue of 1850, which also forms the basis of the article in "Public Libraries a Hun-

dred Years Ago" by Horace E. Scudder (see p. 4*n*1), as also of Mr. Van Pelt's sketch quoted above. What seems to have been a fuller and more nearly accurate account, however, in an historical address delivered by Chairman de Peyster in 1872, is not known to have been printed. Chap. IX, *infra*.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 43, 69-70.



1. *The Bray Foundation, or the Library of  
Trinity Parish, 1698-1776*

So far as known, the earliest printed mention of a Library as an institution in New York appears in an obscure and now rare little book, published at London in 1698, with one of the inordinately long titles then common, but which may briefly be called "*Apostolick Charity*."<sup>1</sup> It has for a preface "*A General View of the English Colonies in America, with respect to Religion; In order to shew what Provision is wanting for the Propagation of Christianity in those Parts.*" Here, under a tabular arrangement into *Colonies, Parishes & Churches, Ministers, and Libraries*, conditions in New York are thus itemized: "1 Church in the Fort. 1 Church in the City. 2 *Dutch* Churches. 1 *French* Church. 1 Minister in the Fort. 1 Minister in the City. 2 *Dutch* Ministers. 1 *French* Minister. 1 Library." Further study reveals that credit for establishing the last-named interest belongs to the learned author himself, the Rev. Thomas Bray, D.D.

Born at Marton, Shropshire, in 1656, a graduate of All Souls' College, Oxford, a successful pastor and an able writer, Dr. Bray had been appointed by the Bishop of London in April, 1696, to act as commissary of ecclesiastical affairs in Maryland. This post he was "content to accept," if the bishops would help him provide "Parochial Libraries" for the use of the missionaries he should

<sup>1</sup> *Apostolick Charity, its Nature and Excellence Consider'd. In a Discourse upon Dan. 12. 3. Preached at St. Pauls, Decemb. 19, 1697, at the Ordination of some Protestant Missionaries to be sent into the Planta-*

*tions.* By Thomas Bray, D.D. London, 1698. The copy whose title-page is here reproduced is in the New York Public Library. An author's presentation copy is in the Library of the General Theological Seminary.

[ \* \* \* ]

	Colonies.	Parishes & Churches	Ministers	Libraries
III.	<i>New-York.</i>	1 Church in the Fort.	1 Minister in the Fort.	1 Library.
		1 Church in the City.	1 Minister in the City.	
		2 Dutch Churches.	2 Dutch Ministers.	
		1 French Church.	1 French Minister.	
	1. <i>Long-Island</i>	1 3 Churches.	Not 1 Church of England Minister, tho' much desir'd in the English Part.	
			3 Dutch Ministers in the West-part.	
	2. <i>Albany,</i> A large City, consisting of 400 Families, bordering up- on the Indians, and belong- ing to the Go- vernment of <i>New York.</i>	1 Church in the Fort for the Garrison, consisting of 2 Foot-Companies, and the English Inhabitants of the Town.		
		1 Dutch Church.	1 Dutch Minister.	
		1 French Church.	1 French Minister.	
		1 Swedish Church.	1 Swedish Minister.	
IV.	<i>East New Jersey</i>	In <i>East-Jersey</i> there are 8 Towns, no Church.	1 Minister going over	A Library begua.
V.	<i>West</i>	In this Province there are also several Towns.		
VI.	<i>Pensylvania.</i>	1 Church at <i>Philadel-phia</i> , having a considerable Number of Church of England Protestants.	1 Minister. 1 School-Master.	1 Library.

*Colonies.*

Second page (slightly reduced) of preface to "Apostolick Charity," published in 1698, containing first printed mention of a Library in New York. See p. 8.



send to America, the majority of whom, he said, would be of "the poorer sort of Clergy, who could not sufficiently supply themselves with books."<sup>1</sup> The church dignitaries cordially endorsed this proposal, believing that his "Design" would, "in all likelihood, invite some of the more studious and virtuous persons out of the Universities to undertake the ministry in those parts, and be a means of rendering them useful, when they are there."<sup>2</sup> With even greater earnestness the commissary himself declared, a year and a half later:

By Experience, as well as the Reason of the Thing, I 'm convinc'd, That 100 l. laid out in a LIBRARY, is what will best induce a Learned and Sober Minister to go into the Service of any part of the Church in the Plantations; And that the same is a necessary Encouragement, considering that few Men of Fortunes, who are able to purchase Books for themselves, will go into such remote Parts.<sup>3</sup>

Although for political reasons Dr. Bray did not set out for his new field until 1699,<sup>4</sup> he had been busy choosing his men and despatching sundry "book presses" overseas. The first few consignments went naturally to Maryland and neighboring provinces. But that was only the beginning of his plan. Two years before, he had issued a brochure with a similarly interminable caption, "An Essay towards promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge, both Divine and Human, in all the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bray's proposal in reply to his appointment as commissary. Here copied from "Memoir of Dr. Bray" in the *Report of Dr. Bray's Associates for 1905*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> From a document in Lambeth Palace Library, signed by Archbishops Tenison and Sharpe and by Bishops Compton, Lloyd, Stillingfleet, Patrick and Moore. "Memoir of Dr. Bray," p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Apostolick Charity*, pp. (iv-v).

<sup>4</sup> "He took his Voyage December 16, 1699, and arriv'd in Maryland after an extream tedious and dangerous Passage, the 12th of March following"; but within the year he made a "speedy Return," without going far, if at all, beyond the Maryland border. See *Publick Spirit Illustrated* . . . (1st edition), pp. 26, 35.

Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, both at Home and Abroad."<sup>1</sup>

First in this work comes a six-page homily on Knowledge, "the fairest Ornament of the Soul of Man," which "does more distinguish the Possessors of it than Titles, Riches, or great Places: . . . whilst the Gaudy, but Empty Beau, is no other than the Scorn and Derision of all who Converse with him." Then, fearing lest his plans should seem too limited in scope, he hastens to add: "Though this Design seems more immediately directed to the Service of the Clergy, yet Gentlemen, Physicians and Lawyers will perceive they are not neglected in it." The writer next addresses "Proposals to the Gentry and Clergy of this Kingdom, for Purchasing Lending Libraries in all the Deanaries of England, and Parochial Libraries for Maryland, Virginia, and other of the Foreign Plantations." His fully matured purpose is disclosed in this quaint and touching conclusion:

In short, as meer Zeal for Publick Service hath excited me to leave no Stone unturn'd, to procure *Parochial Libraries* for the Plantations, in which I thank God I have had hitherto no mean Success; . . . Instead of *Libraries for Maryland*, the bounds of my first Design, I shall not only extend my Endeavours for the Supply of all the *English Colonies in America* therewith; but can most willing be a Missionary into every one of those Provinces, to fix and settle them therein when they are obtain'd, being so fully perswaded of the great Benefit of these kind of *Libraries*, that I should not think 'em too dear a Purchase, even at the hazard of my Life.

A complete system for founding and "preserving" Libraries is thereupon elaborated. Several pages are filled with titles of suitable books, comprising works in all

<sup>1</sup> London, 1697. A copy is in the New York Public Library.

lines of literature, especial emphasis of course being laid on theology. In passing, it might be of interest to know how many collections sent to America owed existence to the following thrifty scheme: "That what *Gratis-Books* will be obtain'd of the Bookseller, in consideration of so many bought of 'em towards these *Lending Libraries*; that these be set apart towards making up *Parochial Libraries* for the *Foreign Plantations*."

The origin of the first New York Library, however, was clearly due to no such bonus arrangement. For upon a manuscript catalogue—about all that remains of this early collection—the price of each volume is carefully annexed, the total cost amounting to exactly £70. This list is to-day, as it has been for nearly two hundred years, in the possession of "Dr. Bray's Associates," a board of trustees organized by that good man in 1723 to found Clerical Libraries and for the education of negro slaves in the colonies. Under this heading, "A Register of y<sup>e</sup> Books Sent towards Laying y<sup>e</sup> Founda<sup>c</sup>on of a Provincial Library in New York,"<sup>1</sup> appear 157 titles numbering 220 volumes, grouped into the following comprehensive classification:

I The H. Script: w<sup>th</sup> Commentators, 23; II Fathers, 7; III Discourses Apologetical, 9; IIII Bodies of Divinity both Catechetical & Scholastical, 14; V On y<sup>e</sup> Gen<sup>l</sup> Doctrine of y<sup>e</sup> Cov<sup>t</sup> of Grace, 2, and On the Creed—both y<sup>e</sup> whole Body of Cre<sup>d</sup>enda & on particular Articles, 18; VI Of Moral Laws & X<sup>an</sup> Duties, 28; VII Of Repent: & Mortifica<sup>c</sup>on, 3; VIII Of Divine Assistance, Prayer and y<sup>e</sup> Sacram<sup>ts</sup>.—those Means of perform-

<sup>1</sup> The title-page of the MS. from which this list is copied reads as follows: *Bibliothecæ Provinciales Americanæ, Being the Registers of Books Sent Towards Laying the Founda<sup>c</sup>on of Five more provincial Libraries in Imitation of that of*

*Añópolis in Mary Land. For the use and Benefit of the Clergy and others in the Provinces of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Carolina, & Bermudas. Vol. II. By Thomas Bray, D.D.*



ing the foregoing Articles, 10; IX Sermons, 34; X Ministerial Directories, 5; XI Controversial, 19; XII Historical and Geographical,—i Humanity, viz<sup>t</sup> Ethicks & Oeconomicks, 6; ii Polity & Law, 0; iii History and its Appendages—Chronology, Geography, Voyages and Travails, 23; iiij Physiology, Anatomy, Chirurgery & Medicine, 2; v Mathematicks & Trade, 0; vi Grammars & Lexicons, 6; vii Rhetorick, 1; viii Logick, 1; ix Poetry, 3—Poetæ Antiqui, Buchanani Psalmi 12°, Miltons paradise Lost; x Miscellanies, 6.<sup>1</sup>

More than this could scarcely have been asked by the most ardent booklover of that day—from the point of view of the clergy, that is—in the way of subjects; the only remaining desideratum would be the certainty of substantial and frequent increase, an interest not as thoroughly furthered by the broad-visioned promoter, as will presently appear. Nevertheless, the arrangement just quoted deserves more than passing attention, not alone for being a good specimen of an early classification for an American library, but also for its admirable character even to-day; while the list itself comprises the standard works of the period for a clergyman's library.

That the little assortment reached its destination is proved by a fairly exact copy of the catalogue spread in full upon the old manuscript book of minutes of the vestry of Trinity parish, under the following slightly altered inscription: "A Register of the Books sent towards laying the foundation of a parochial Library in

<sup>1</sup>This scheme corresponds, with trifling exceptions, chiefly in the omission of explanatory notes, to Dr. Bray's elaborate classification in his *Bibliothecæ Americanæ Quadrupartitæ; or Catalogues of the Libraries sent into the Severall Provinces belonging to the Crown of England, in order to promote all the parts of Usefull and Necessary Knowledge*

*both Divine and Humane*, a MS. work now in the Library of Sion College, London. A transcript is in the New York Public Library. Sion College is a sort of guild or corporation of the parochial clergy, rectors, vicars, lecturers and curates of the city of London proper and immediate suburbs, having been founded about the year 1625.

*A Register  
of y<sup>e</sup> Books Lent towards Laying  
y<sup>e</sup> Foundation of a Provincial  
Library in New York.*

*I. The H. Script: w<sup>th</sup> Commentators.*

<i>Verba Biblia Hebraicæ Græcæ Latine 2 Vol fol.</i>	<i>1 15 0</i>
<i>Poli Synopsis Criticorū 5 Vol fol.</i>	<i>4 15 0</i>
<i>Parks Annotations on y<sup>e</sup> Bible fol.º</i>	<i>1 5 0</i>
<i>— On Exodus. 4º</i>	<i>0 9 0</i>
<i>— On Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes 5 Vol</i>	<i>4 2 0</i>
<i>D<sup>r</sup> Hammond on y<sup>e</sup> N. Testam<sup>t</sup> fol.</i>	<i>3 4 0</i>
<i>Oxford's Paraphrase on Paul's Epistles 8º</i>	<i>0 4 0</i>
<i>M<sup>r</sup> Joseph Mede's Works fol.</i>	<i>1 3 0</i>
<i>Howards On Difficult Texts 2 Vol. 8º with his other Works 1</i>	<i>4 0</i>
<i>Newsall's Bibliotheca 2 Vol fol</i>	<i>3 0 0</i>



Yardon near the Lutheran Church Yard (by the name of Robinsons Street) And for greater Ornament that they intend to Continue the post and Rail fence in the Street fronting the Church Yard to the North side of the Lane is by them intended to be laid out All which they prayd this Court will be pleased to give them Leave to do, which is by this Court accordingly granted - The said Church wardens and Committee having presented that the Lane or Alley so proposed to be left shall remain as a publick lane or Alley for ever and that the same shall be recorded as such accordingly.

By Order of Common Council  
Wm. Sharpe Esq.

Catalogue of Books

## A Register ~ ~ ~ of the Books sent towards laying the foundation of a parochial Library in New York for the use of the Ministers of Holy Trinity Church.

1<sup>st</sup> The Holy Script: 10.<sup>th</sup> Commentators.

Votabli Biblia Hebraica Graeco Latina 2 Vol fol

Polydywig his Criticon 5 Vol fol

Clarke's Annotations on the Bible fol

B of Eli - on Rodus 4<sup>o</sup>

2 on Job, Psalm, Prov: Ecclesiastes 5 Vol

D<sup>r</sup> Hammond on the N Testament fol

Oxfords Paraphrase on St Pauls Epistles 10.

M Joseph Moxon Works fol 2 Vol

Edwards on Difficult Points 2 Vol 8<sup>o</sup> w<sup>th</sup> his other works

Ravensall's Bibliotheca 2 Vol fol

Benedicti mollificans 4<sup>o</sup>

A Concordance 10.

New York for the Use of the Ministers of Holy Trinity Church"!<sup>1</sup> Though at first sight this discrepancy in phrasing might cause a shock in its suggestion of perverted funds, fortunately for the honor of the venerable and venerated parish in question, the latter style expresses precisely the intention of the founders. This is quite apparent from the set of rules accompanying the books, written as early as 1697 in the following form:

## DIRECTIONS

FFOR Y<sup>E</sup> USE, & P<sup>R</sup>SERVATION OF Y<sup>E</sup> LIBRARY  
SENT W<sup>TH</sup> HIS EXCELLENCY THE EARL OF BELLAMONT TO  
NEW YORK IN AMERICA

Ffirst y<sup>e</sup> Cheif Design of this Library is for y<sup>e</sup> Use of y<sup>e</sup> Church of England Ministers belonging to y<sup>e</sup> Ffort, & City of New York, & for y<sup>e</sup> Chaplains of his Maj<sup>ties</sup> Ships during their Residence in y<sup>t</sup> Port.

Secondly To y<sup>e</sup> End y<sup>t</sup> any P<sup>r</sup>sons concernd may have a freer Ingress, & Regress, it is desir'd y<sup>e</sup> Books may be fixt in some publick Roome in y<sup>e</sup> Ffort, or in y<sup>e</sup> Vestry of y<sup>e</sup> Church at New York, so as shall be most Convenient for y<sup>e</sup> Clergy to come at y<sup>e</sup> Use of 'em.

Thirdly That three Registers of these Books be made, one whereof to Remain w<sup>th</sup> y<sup>e</sup> L<sup>d</sup> B<sup>p</sup> of London, a Second w<sup>th</sup> his Excellency y<sup>e</sup> Govern<sup>r</sup>, & a Third to remain in y<sup>e</sup> Library.

Ffor y<sup>e</sup> bett<sup>r</sup> p<sup>r</sup>servation of em it is desird y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Gentlemen of y<sup>e</sup> Vestry wou'd yearly Inspect y<sup>e</sup> Books & p<sup>r</sup>sent, as to y<sup>e</sup> Gov<sup>nr</sup>, so to y<sup>e</sup> L<sup>d</sup> B<sup>p</sup> of London an acc<sup>t</sup> wheth<sup>r</sup> they are Safe, or anywise Imbezeld or Lost.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Coote, first Earl of Bellomont, was commissioned by King William III in June, 1697, as royal governor of the provinces of New York, Massachusetts and

<sup>1</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, vol. I, p. 200 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> The original, marked "Duplicate" in pencil in a later hand, and a care-

fully written copy are to-day preserved in the collection of manuscripts left by Dr. Bray to Sion College.

New Hampshire. He landed in New York city April 2, 1698, after a tempestuous passage of seven months' duration. The voyage may well be regarded as an omen of his stormy term of office, whose brief three years were filled with bitter quarrels. His efforts to counteract the policy of his notorious predecessor, Colonel Benjamin Fletcher,—who had issued territorial grants with a lavish hand, and who was almost openly in league with piracy,—naturally aroused great hostility and left him scant opportunity to patronize an infant library. Furthermore, he soon became involved in a serious personal difference with the Rev. William Vesey, first rector of Trinity parish, so that harmony between them on any matter was wholly impossible.

In due time the governor fulfilled this part of his mission, however, for the Trinity vestry minutes bear this record for June 8, 1698: "M<sup>r</sup> Vesey having informed y<sup>e</sup> Board that [he] has rec<sup>d</sup> from his Excel<sup>t</sup> Rich: Earl of Bellomont a parcell of Books of Divinity sent over by y<sup>e</sup> right Reverend Henry Lord Bishop of London for y<sup>e</sup> Use of Trinity Church for which he hath given a receipt to his Excel<sup>t</sup> a list whereof is produced. It is *ordered* the books remain in the custody of M<sup>r</sup> Vesey untill further order and that y<sup>e</sup> Clerk do register the Catalogue of the books in the vestry book."<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, what may have been the nucleus of a Library had already been formed in a gift from the retiring executive, Colonel Fletcher, who had shown his good will to Trinity by signing its original charter, May 6, 1697, and in the granting of an extensive land lease to the parish. For, at a vestry meeting held March 26,

<sup>1</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, I, 25-26. follow at once, beginning on page 200.  
The "Catalogue," however, does not



1698, "M<sup>r</sup> David Jamison reports that his Excel<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Gov<sup>r</sup> has given a Bible & some other books to this Corporation for y<sup>e</sup> use of Trinity Church w<sup>ch</sup> are Suppos'd to be in y<sup>e</sup> hands of M<sup>r</sup> Symon Smith. *Ordered* Capt Wilson & W<sup>m</sup> Sharpas do waite upon M<sup>r</sup> Smith & aske for y<sup>e</sup> Same."<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, the vestrymen of Trinity Church have uniformly been influential citizens, and these early members certainly present no exception. David Jameson held successively the offices of deputy secretary of the province, clerk of the assembly and city recorder; Captain Ebenezer Willson, for years city treasurer, had been a common councilman and later occupied the mayoralty from 1707 to 1710; while William Sharpas, confirmed as town clerk in the Dongan charter in 1686, held that important post until his death in 1739. Lastly, the Rev. Simon Smith was chaplain of the forces in the fort from 1696 to 1700, the chapel having been ordered rebuilt by Governor Fletcher in the year 1695.<sup>2</sup>

The first Trinity Church, which stood on the present site on land formerly a portion of the old Dutch West India Company's garden, had been opened for public worship in March, 1698. That the books were housed in this edifice, doubtless from their receipt, is plain from a letter of Mr. Vesey's to Governor Nicholson of Virginia,

<sup>1</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, I, 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Of this event the Rev. John Miller, chaplain, 1692-1695, writes: "The Chappell was first built about the year 1630 but growing ruinous it was pull'd Down Ano<sup>o</sup> 1694 & rebuilt in y<sup>e</sup> years of X 1695 & 1696." From a note in his own hand on the fly-leaf of a great Bible, now in the N. Y. Public Library, and of which he says: "This Bible belonged to the Chappell in the Kings fort at New York & fell to my Lot upon

Gov<sup>r</sup> Fletchers carrying over another for that use & purpose in y<sup>e</sup> year 1692." The chapel was destroyed early in 1741 in "the late fatal fire that laid in ashes the house, chapple, barracks & Secretary's office in his Majesty's fort in this Town." Speech of Lt.-Gov. George Clarke to the Council, April 15, 1741. *Journal of the Legislative Council, 1691-1743*. Albany, 1861. P. 769.

dated June 9, 1702, in which he tells how, at the suggestion of "his Reverence Dr<sup>r</sup> Bray," a "happy Society" of the several ministers of the city was "maintained in the Church Library."<sup>1</sup>

Other lists, also preserved in the archives of the Bray Associates, show that additions were made from time to time to the original collection. For example, under "A Catalogue of Books Sent Aug<sup>t</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> 1701 to New York to Improve the Library at New York," appear some twenty titles covering twenty-four volumes of sermons and religious treatises, the cost of each book being entered as before. Again, as few as eight volumes, similarly devotional in character, were accompanied with "A Catalogue of the Books Sent Ap<sup>l</sup> 23, 1702 to Augm<sup>t</sup> the Library at New York."

Both these accessions are found copied in the Trinity vestry minutes<sup>2</sup> directly following the first "Register." A supplementary reference to the subject appears in the proceedings of June 2, 1701, when "The Vestrey Examined the Churches Library according to the Catalogue Sent from Dr<sup>r</sup> Bray & Signed the same returned with an Acco<sup>t</sup> of what books were wanting & w<sup>t</sup> were not in the Catalogue."<sup>3</sup>

The next consignment, comprising six volumes, is styled in the church records "A Catalogue of Books Sent to the Library Anno 1704." Subsequent donations, however, seem to have come from private sources, full credit for the gifts being expressed. The first of such presents,

<sup>1</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book* (copies), no. 112, 1702-1799. The archives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts have been for years at no. 19 Delahay st., Westminster, London. A later copy by Dr. Hawks is in the Gen. Conv.

Archives, N. Y. MSS., I, 14-15. These Hawks papers are kept in the Church Missions House, 4th ave. and 22d st., N. Y. city.

<sup>2</sup> Vestry minutes, I, 208 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 38.



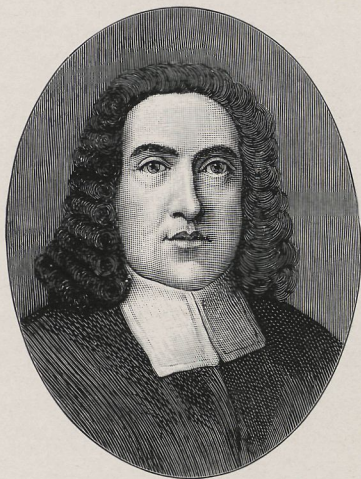
a collection of twelve doctrinal works, is entered under "A Catalogue of Books given to the Library of New York by Tho<sup>s</sup> Byerly Esq<sup>r</sup> Colector and Receiver General of the province of New York of the Value of five pounds Sterling 1704 & brought from London by Mr Brett 1705." Immediately after this, acknowledgment is made of some books "At the Same time Sent by the Bishop of London," including prayer books and "22 Serious Exortations to the practice of Religious Duties both publick and private. Sent to be Distributed among the poor by the Minister."

Following this doubtless most comforting benefaction comes an entry well calculated to awaken antiquarian attention. Thus reads the record: "Jañry 1712 Given the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> the Earle of Clarendons y<sup>e</sup> History of the Rebellion & Civil Wares in 3 Vol. fol."<sup>1</sup> And interest centers in the announcement because the second volume of this very set may be seen to-day in the New York Society Library. Natural sentiment attaching to this venerable book, a pathetic survivor of New York's first Library, is heightened by an ornate label on its front cover, bearing in gilt letters still bright the clear-cut legend, BELONGING TO Y<sup>E</sup> LIBRARY OF NEW YORK IN AMERICA 1711.

Certainly here was offered an agreeable contrast to the dull monotony of theological lore. Though the kindly donor's name is not known, he may reasonably be

<sup>1</sup> Edward Earl of Clarendon. *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*. Oxford, 1703. This was not the only copy in the early Library, for the Trinity vestry minutes show that in January, 1709, Lord Cornbury, then removed from the governorship and confined in the debtors' prison, on the top

floor of the City Hall, "had presented . . . the Library with the Lord Clarendons first part of the History of the Civil Warrs of the Kingdome of England." Vol. I, p. 63. This gift had quite a personal touch, for Lord Cornbury—as was also Queen Anne—was a grandchild of the author.



Rev. Thomas Bray, D.D.

Founder of the first Library in New York, 1698



presumed to have been either Dr. Bray or the Bishop of London again, for this gilt lettering conforms exactly with that on the books brought by Lord Bellomont in 1698 for Boston, as the nucleus of its parochial library.<sup>1</sup> This collection, known as King's Chapel Library, has long been deposited in the Boston Athenæum. It comprises some 110 volumes, with the royal stamp, SVB AVSPICIIS WILHELMI III, on one cover, and on the other, DE BIBLIOTHECA DE BOSTON. A few of the books, however, are labeled like the old Clarendon history, BELONGING TO Y<sup>E</sup> LIBRARY OF BOSTON IN NEW ENGLAND, though no date is affixed, that feature evidently having come as an improvement in course of time. Moreover, Dr. Bray had expressly directed:

*THAT for further Security to preserve them from Loss and Imbezelment, and that they may be known where-ever they are found; in every Book, on the one side of the Cover, shall be Letter'd these Words, SUB AVSPICIIS WILLIELMI III. on the other side the Name of the Parish to which these Books do belong: EX. GR. E. BIBLIOTHECA DE MARY-TOWN: E. BIBLIOTHECA DE JAMES-TOWN, &c.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Receipt of these books was acknowledged in a letter to the Lord Bishop of London under date of July 25, 1698, as appears from a copy in the vestry minutes of King's Chapel, Boston. Its records also contain a catalogue of the books, classified much like those for New York, and styled, "A Register of Books Sent with his Excellency the Earl of Bellomont towards laying the foundation of a Library for the use of the Church of England Clergy in Boston." The list is given in full, to the number of 211 volumes, by the Rev. Henry W. Foote in the "Proceedings" of the Mass. Hist. Soc. for May, 1881, 1st series, vol. XVIII. Boston, 1881. Pages 426-430. The original "Register" pre-

cedes that of the slightly larger New York consignment in the MS. brochure, *Bibliothecæ Provinciales Americanæ* (see p. 12n), bound into a nameless, leather-covered volume now in the keeping of the Bray Associates. Each volume of the old collection now in the Boston Athenæum also bears on its inside cover this stamp, "BELONGING TO KING'S CHAPEL LIBRARY, BOSTON." A rebound folio with this same label is in the Library of the General Theological Seminary, New York. It is "The Book of Common Prayer," published in London in 1739, so that it was of course a later contribution.

<sup>2</sup> "Proposals for the Encouragement and Promoting of Religion



We may therefore easily imagine how the earlier volumes of New York's first Library were probably stamped. But of that little collection the Clarendon book alone survives to-day in its solitary isolation in the Society Library. How and when it came there can only be conjectured, as will be seen.<sup>1</sup>

✓ It is thus perfectly patent that the first Library in New York was wholly parochial in scope. But from its being intended for the use of the clergy in general, it assumed a more public character. And that it was even so styled is evident from one source at least. For, at a Trinity vestry meeting, June 13, 1707, "the Reverend Mr Vesey inform'd this Board Tho: Byerly Esq<sup>r</sup> had presented the public Library with Books amounting to Six pounds which are put down in the Catalogue thereof,"<sup>2</sup> as related above.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1700, Dr. Bray had widened his Library plan to include among its beneficiaries the laity, for whom were to be provided "Lending Laymen's Libraries." He had previously written, that "in the Chief Town in each Province it would be requisite to have a Library of more Universal Learning, for the Service and Encouragement of those who shall launch out farther in the pursuit of Useful Knowledge, as well

and Learning in the Foreign Plantations." P. 124, Part I, of *Bibliotheca Parochialis*. London, 1697. Reprinted in "Rev. Thomas Bray. His Life and Selected Works Relating to Maryland." Edited by Bernard C. Steiner. Pp. 204-205. *Vide infra*, p. 27n1.

<sup>1</sup>Since this matter was set up in type, there has come to light in the Library of the General Theological Seminary a single folio volume, its respective covers stamped, in similar gilt characters, SVB AVSPICIIS

WILHELMI III, and DE BIBLIOTHECA DE NEW YORK. Furthermore, the title, "Epiphaniij Opera 2 Vol. Colon. 1682,"—entered under the heading, "Fathers," in the original "Register" of 1697, as in its copy in the Trinity vestry minutes,—identifies this book, the second volume of the work, as part of the original consignment brought over by Lord Bellomont.

<sup>2</sup>Trinity vestry minutes, I, 58.

<sup>3</sup>*Supra*, p. 20.



Natural as Divine.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly he now arranged to despatch books “to be Lent or Given at the Discretion of the Minister,” the clergy being “the Persons whose Chief Business it is to be Men of Knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> In one of his “Circular Letters” to the clergy of Maryland in 1701, this enthusiastic man speaks of the Layman’s Library as “my darling Contrivance.” Among recipients of its benefits are included “y<sup>e</sup> Chief Governors,” “y<sup>e</sup> Best Disposed Magistrates,” and “y<sup>e</sup> publick Houses.”

To expedite this measure Dr. Bray proposed the appointment of a special agent in America, with the following towns as distributing centers or “chief stations”: Boston; New York, “from whence he may go to Long Island & East Jersey”; Philadelphia; “Annapolis in Mary Land”; and Williamsburg, Virginia.<sup>3</sup> The Rev. George Keith, a clergyman of renowned fervor, was chosen to conduct the new enterprise. Both his selection and the character of the matter to be distributed show clearly that the missionary idea was even more pronounced than before. Mr. Keith, himself a rabid convert from Quakerism, was to be supplied with books and tracts of an exclusively religious tone,—without a gleam of worldliness to lighten their pervading solemnity,—under the following heads: the Scriptures; works “for y<sup>e</sup> Instruction of Catechumens”; others “for y<sup>e</sup> use of y<sup>e</sup> Adults”; still others “to promote . . . a Reformation of Manners”; writings “to prepare y<sup>e</sup> Adults for y<sup>e</sup> Worthy Receiving of both y<sup>e</sup> Sacram<sup>ts</sup>”; and, lastly, works aimed “to Recover to y<sup>e</sup> Unity of the Church all such as have Gone astray into Heresy and Schism,” such wanderers being classified as Quakers, Dissenters and Papists.

<sup>1</sup> *Apostolick Charity*, p. (v).

<sup>2</sup> From the preface to *Bibliothecæ*

*Americanæ Quadripartitæ*. See p. 13n.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

George Keith set sail in April, 1702, and remained in the colonies for a little over two years, as the first missionary sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts on a tour of personal investigation. Concerning the condition of the Anglican church in New York, he thus expresses himself upon arrival:

The Church of England under the late Administration of the Lord Bellamont and Captain Nanfan hath been grievously opposed and oppressed; but since the auspicious arrival of the Right Honorable the Lord Cornbury, has been delivered from the violence of her enemies, restored to her rights, greatly countenanced and encouraged, and lives under the just expectation of being more firmly established and enlarged.<sup>1</sup>

Lists of books and tracts sent over to America for this work among laymen are preserved to-day with the Bray papers in the Library of Sion College, London. One of them is styled "An Acc<sup>t</sup> of the Books Set up in y<sup>e</sup> Bookpress Sent to N. York." It is not dated, but that the books were received appears in a letter from Mr. Keith to Dr. Bray, dated at Philadelphia, February 24, 1704, as follows: "The six boxes you sent are all come safe; that to Boston, that to New York, that to the two Jerseys, and that to Pennsylvania, are all disposed of already, according to your orders, and are very acceptable to the people."<sup>2</sup> The majority of the books were not only deeply religious in character but excessively contro-

<sup>1</sup> *Collections of the Protestant Episcopal Historical Society*. New York, 1851. Page xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv. Also quoted by the Rev. Joseph Hooper in his pamphlet "George Keith," in *Soldier & Servant Series*, Hartford, 1894. P. 15. That this work was maintained is clear from a memorandum in the

Rev. John Sharpe's diary: "A Catalogue of Books given by the Society for propagation of the Gospel to His Exc<sup>y</sup> Coll<sup>r</sup> Hunter which are now given to be distributed." It includes 15 titles of tracts, numbering in all 530 volumes. (Governor Hunter arrived at New York in June, 1710.)

versial as well, comprising many copies of the Rev. Charles Leslie's "Y<sup>e</sup> Snake in y<sup>e</sup> Grass"—that reptile being understood to mean Quakerism—and of Bugg's "Pilgrim's Progress from Quakerism to Christianity."

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NEW YORK

Gilt letters (facsimile size) stamped on covers of surviving volume of first consignment of Bray books to New York, 1697. See pp. 21, 22*n*1.

Evidently Mr. Keith had been directed also to look into the condition of the several Parochial Libraries, for in a long letter to Dr. Bray from Philadelphia in the spring of 1703 he writes, in part: "I view'd the Library att Boston, as ye ordered me, and find it in good Condition. But at N. York I could not have the Catalogue.



Mr. Vesey the Minister told me the Chaplain of the fort had carried it away w<sup>th</sup> him to England." There is nothing in the records to indicate who this offending person was. The Rev. Edmond Mott held the chaplaincy for the two years preceding his death in 1704.<sup>1</sup> According to the rather confusing table of chaplains in the appendix to the recently published history of Trinity parish,<sup>2</sup> his immediate predecessor was the Rev. John Peter Brisac, who in 1701 succeeded the Rev. Simon Smith, incumbent from 1696 to 1700. This last-named individual, it will be recalled, was for a time the unofficial custodian of the first books given by Governor Fletcher in 1698. He is mentioned in the vestry minutes of September 23, 1700, as "suspended,"<sup>3</sup> so he may as well bear the further odium of having absconded with the Library catalogue.

It must long since have become apparent that Dr. Bray was a man of unusual creative power. He should be accounted one of the ablest organizers in the colonial period of American history, for his efforts led to the establishment of the celebrated "Venerable" Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, chartered June 20, 1701, and of the still older Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge—both institutions wielding great influence. To the former New York is especially indebted for its instrumentality in establish-

<sup>1</sup> Possibly this person's private library was joined with the parish collection, for Governor Cornbury wrote to the Lords of Trade, Oct. 3, 1706, that Mr. Mott, "late Chaplain to Her Majty's forces here, . . . has left some books of which I herewith send a Catalogue." *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, vol. IV, p. 1182.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan Dix. *A History of the Parish of Trinity Church*. New

York. 1898. Vol. I, appendix ix, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, I, 35. Also, Lord Bellomont wrote to the Lords of Trade, Oct. 17, 1700: "I suspended Parson Smith, Chaplain to these Companys, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of last August for affronting my Lord Bishop of London and for living a scandalous life." *Col. Docs.*, IV, 719.



ing, among similar institutions in America, the first Public Circulating Library (the Corporation Library) ✓ and the first College Library (the Library of King's College) in the metropolis, the history of both of which will presently be reviewed. The study of Dr. Bray's life and work is profitable, so interesting and useful was his career, and so abiding have been many fruits of his labors and sacrifices.<sup>1</sup>

In 1746 there was published an appreciative volume entitled "Publick Spirit Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray, D.D." An appendix to its second edition (1808) gives this summary of his chief work: "By the exactest account that has been procured, upwards of Fifty Libraries, it appears, were founded by Dr. Bray in America and other countries abroad, and Sixty-One Parochial Libraries in England and Wales." A schedule is added, according to which four collections had been sent "into the Government of New York," namely: to the city of New York, 211; "to Amboy in New Jersey," 30; to Albany, 10;<sup>2</sup> and "to

<sup>1</sup> For sources, see Dr. Bernard C. Steiner's article, "Rev. Thomas Bray and his American Libraries," in *The American Historical Review*. New York, 1897. Vol. II, p. 59 *et seq.*; "Parochial Libraries in the Colonial Period," by Bishop John F. Hurst, D.D., in *Papers of the American Society of Church History*. New York, 1890. Vol. II, pp. 37-50; and, especially, "Rev. Thomas Bray. His Life and Selected Works Relating to Maryland." Edited by B. C. Steiner. *Maryland Historical Society Fund Publication*, No. 37. Baltimore, 1901. This collection of reprints contains also "A Short Historical Account of the Life and Designs of Thomas Bray, D.D., late Vicar of St Botolph's without Aldgate," by the Rev. Richard Rawlinson. This sketch, a MS. in the

Bodleian Library, Oxford, was made the basis of *Publick Spirit Illustrated in the Life and Designs of the Reverend Thomas Bray, D.D.* London, 1746. A copy is in the General Seminary Library. A copy of the second edition (1808) is in the New York Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> In the year 1900, one of these ten books, sent early in the 18th century to "The Church of Albany in New York" by Dr. Bray's Associates, was "again in the custody of the parish" of Old St. Peter's. It was a copy of Dr. Bray's own work, *Catechetical Lectures*. London, 1701. See *A History of Saint Peter's Church in the City of Albany*. By the Rev. Joseph Hooper, A.M. Albany, 1900. P. 34n. But in November, 1907, diligent search failed to find the book.

Boston in New England," 221; the figures representing the number of books despatched to each place.

Nevertheless, beyond the few and insignificant accessions already enumerated, the New York collection remained practically dormant. Fully a quarter of a century after its foundation, Rector Vesey, in response to a printed request from the Bishop of London, thus briefly exposes its undeveloped state: "I have under my care in my Study a small parochial library, and though I never received any particular rules and orders concerning it, I assure your Lordship all the books are preserved and kept in good condition."<sup>1</sup> The good rector was evidently quite unmindful of the "Directions" that accompanied the consignment in the first instance. Very properly the church continued to be the repository, and its pastor the custodian, of the little collection. Of its careful preservation indeed, the Rev. Robert Jenney, chaplain at the fort and assistant minister at Trinity, writes suggestively to the Bishop of London in November, 1720, when asking aid to establish the Sharpe collection as a Public Library: ". . . provided it be really a publick library & be not lockt up in y<sup>e</sup> particular Study of any particular person."

It thus appears that some thought at least was paid to the colonial Library, although but slender additions had gained their way to its shelves. The energetic founder himself would seem to have had no system of enlarging the several collections he had brought into being, until

<sup>1</sup> His reply to the last of 17 *Queries to be answered by every Minister*, viz: "Have you a Parochial Library? If you have, are the Books preserved, and kept in good condition? Have you any particular rules and orders for the preserving of them? Are those rules and

orders duly observed?" The original of this paper cannot now be found among the MSS. in Fulham Palace, London. A copy is pasted in Gen. Conv. Arch., N. Y. MSS., I, 640, undated, but similar papers from other parishes in the province are dated 1723 or 1724.

his formation of the Bray Associates, the income from whose charity fund has, since his decease in 1730, established and perpetuated hundreds of Theological Libraries in Great Britain and in her dominions beyond the seas. But the New York Library, with others in what is now the United States, received no further support from home.

Nor did they, on the other hand, meet with much encouragement from the colonists. The Library idea was too advanced for them, especially in New York, where confusion of tongues still prevailed, and where the Anglican element was too unpopular to secure aid for a purely sectarian institution. And the predominant character of the Bray collections was so exclusively devotional and churchly as not to be generally acceptable. It was thus never possible to establish or confirm this early Library by legislative enactment, as its pious founder earnestly desired, and as was done in other provinces.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the Knickerbockers were too deeply engrossed in their private and political concerns for even the well-to-do to be men of leisure. All alike were engaged in business, while for recreation they not unnaturally preferred out-of-door pastimes to excursions in theology. When Governor Bellomont first set foot on the island of Manhattan, echoes of the distracting Leisler excitement, the reflection in New York of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, had by no means died away in the little city, whose settled portion lay wholly below Wall street, and whose inhabitants numbered less than five thousand souls.

From the following lines in an old history one gains

<sup>1</sup> See *Colonial Laws* of Maryland, 1704, 1706, 1712; of North Carolina, 1699, 1727; of South Carolina, 1700, 1715.



an interesting picture of the cultural conditions of those times,—discrediting the while its concluding assertion, especially in view of the facts to be brought out in the present work. Listen, then, to the learned Britisher, James Grahame, how he writes:

A printing-press was established at New York, in the year 1693, by a printer flying from the strange occurrence of Quaker tyranny and persecution in Pennsylvania; and a library was founded under the government of Lord Bellamont in the year 1700. But the schools in this province were inconsiderable; and although the wealthier families obtained valuable instructors for their children among the numerous Protestant refugees from France, the great bulk of the people were strangers even to the first rudiments of science and cultivation, till the era of the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

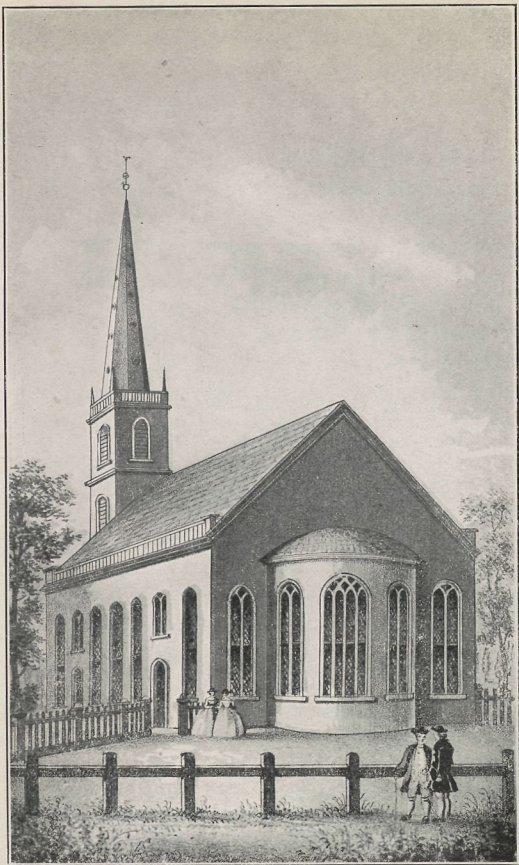
On this allusion to a Library has been based the hitherto uncontroverted claim that "The history of the New York Society Library commences in the year 1700," at which "time 'The Public Library' of New York was founded during the administration of the Earl of Bellamont."<sup>2</sup> Not a little of the glamour attaching to this long-vaunted, cherished belief is therefore dispelled in a realization that the collection was originally but a paltry "parcell" of sober tomes for a Parish Library. Knowledge of the fact, however, will in turn soothe any sting of disappointment at learning that this early Library never had the slightest connection with the Society Library, founded confessedly in 1754. The two institutions maintained independent existences for twenty-two years, side by side in the little capital, the one in Trinity

<sup>1</sup> James Grahame. *The History of the United States*. (London, 1827, 1836.) Boston and Philadelphia, 1845. Vol. II, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Society Library*.

*History, Charter, By-Laws, &c.* 1881. P. 5; also, *Catalogue of the New York Society Library*. 1850. P. vii. See also p. 6, *supra*.





First Trinity Church Building, Broadway  
facing Wall Street

Erected, 1698; enlarged, 1737; destroyed by fire, 1776  
Home of the first Library in New York, 1698-1776



Church and the other in the City Hall,<sup>1</sup> until the moribund career of the former and the first epoch in the history of the latter came to a simultaneous end under the ravages of the Revolution.

An even earlier mention of the older Library is found in another historical work, published almost contemporaneously with the event chronicled, and bearing the ambitious title, "The British Empire in America, Containing the History of the Discovery, Settlement, Progress and present State of all the British Colonies, on the Continent and Islands of America."<sup>2</sup> In the chapter on New York it is stated as proof of advancement that "A Library was erected, this Year [1700], in the City of New-York: And the Dutch Inhabitants built Mills to saw Timber; one of which wou'd do more in an Hour, than 50 Men in 2 Days."<sup>3</sup>

The very arrangement of these informing particulars points with unconscious emphasis to the relative insignificance of a Library in comparison with the general interests of the community at that time. There is no evidence at hand to show that the Dutch ever had so much as thought of a Church Library in New York;<sup>4</sup> while the only reference to books that can be found in their public acts appears in an ordinance of 1662 by the director-general and council of New Netherland against

<sup>1</sup> The City Hall then stood in Wall street opposite Broad, scarcely a stone's throw from Trinity Church, on Broadway facing Wall street.

<sup>2</sup> John Oldmixon. London, 1708.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> In the "Rensselaerswyck MSS." there is recorded a "Catalogue of Books which are sent for the Library in Rensselaerswyck, to be forwarded there." This list comprises 17 titles of theological works by

scholars of well-nigh as many nationalities, English, French, German, Latin, Italian and Spanish, as well as Dutch. The little collection was despatched from Holland in the same vessel that bore the Rev. Johannes Megapolensis to his new field in the colony of Rensselaerswyck. For a list of the books with "remarks," see E. B. O'Callaghan. *History of New Netherland*. New York, 1846. Vol. I, pp. 454-455.

conventicles, whereby "diuerse persons" were prohibited from importing or dispersing "seditious & erroneous boecks, writings & letters."<sup>1</sup> Yet by 1664 there were schools in nearly all the towns and villages of New Netherland, with a Latin or high school of wide repute at New Amsterdam. And certainly the ministers, as also other leading citizens, were the possessors of private collections. Even as elegant a personage as Governor Francis Lovelace is said to have written to King Charles in 1668: "I find some of these people have the breeding of courts, and I cannot conceive how such is acquired."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as one careful student of that period has observed, "the spirit of trade, and those depressing influences common to all colonies and young countries, checked if not stifled literary enterprise."<sup>3</sup>

It is even less probable that other religious bodies in the city had Libraries. The Presbyterians, in point of influence the third denomination, met with too much opposition and discouragement simply in maintaining an establishment in New York to think of conducting a Library. It is therefore not surprising to find in their records no suggestion of such an institution. One significant entry, however, betokens their proper appreciation of the value of books. The trustees of the church on June 1, 1756, took the following action:

*Resolved* That the Rev<sup>d</sup> Mr Bostwick may become a subscriber to the New York Society Library. That the Clerk draw an Or-

<sup>1</sup> *Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638-1674*. Edited by E. B. O'Callaghan. Albany, 1868. P. 428.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Ashbel G. Vermilye, D.D. "Francis Lovelace and the Recapture of New Netherland, 1668-1674." *The Memorial History of New-York*. Vol. I, chap. ix, p.

349. It must be said, however, that no source is given for this quotation, which does not appear in the governor's correspondence printed in the *N. Y. Col. Docs.* or in the *Doc. Hist. of N. Y.*

<sup>3</sup> E. B. O'Callaghan. *History of New Netherland*. New York, 1848. Vol. II, p. 547.



der in his Favour on the Treasurer for such sum as the Subscription money may amount to And it is to be understood that this Interest in the Library is given to M<sup>r</sup> Bostwick as Minister of this Church, & that at his Decease his Heir Executor or Administrator or Legatee or himself in Case he shall cease to be our Minister in his Life time will assign his Interest in the said Library to such Person as the Majority of the Trustees shall direct and that he will in the mean Time pay the annual Subscription money due by the Articles.<sup>1</sup>

The subsequent history of the old Trinity Parish Library—as it should properly be called—is also of interest, culminating in truly dramatic fashion. All its later acquisitions, so far as the vestry proceedings reveal, seem to have been presented by the same individual, “the pious M<sup>r</sup> Elliston,” a personage of no little consequence, to judge by the deferential manner in which his name and station, as well as votes of appreciation, are entered in the ancient minutes. Beginning in 1715 these donations, together with sundry offerings of choice plate, were continued intermittently for many years, the last “Additionall Number of Books to the Parochial Library” being recorded in July, 1741.

All told, these benefactions number some 116 volumes, covering six pages of the “Catalogue” in the big manuscript folio,<sup>2</sup> and thus introduced: “Robert Elliston Gent. Comptrol<sup>r</sup> of his Majesty’s Customs in New York in America. His Gift of the Books by the Reverend Authors in the Catalogue ffollowing; To Holy Trinity Church in New York City Its Library.” The titles are tabulated under these headings: “The Reverend Authors Named,” “Their Respective Tracts Distinguished,” and

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. David Bostwick died in November, 1763; his share, according to the Society Library records,

was transferred in 1766 to Henry Remsen, Jr., who paid the arrears.

<sup>2</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, I, 210-212; 218-220.

at the same time sent by the Bishop of London—  
12 Cotton prayer books 12.  
22 Serious Exhortations to the practice of Religious  
Duties both publick and private sent to be Distributed  
Among the poor and by the Minister.

Janry 1712 Given the Right Honble the  
Earle of Clarendon 17.  
History of the Rebellion &  
Civil Wars in 3 Vol. fol.

Janry 1715 Given by the Rev Mr Elliston  
two Volumes of Dr J. W. Dean of Bangor  
10<sup>th</sup> are inserted in the Catalogue of books by him given  
to the Library Aug. 24 1730.

Robert Elliston Gent. Comptrolr.  
of his majestys Customs in New York in  
America.

His gift  
of the Books by the Reverend Authors in the Catalogue  
following;  
To Holy Trinity Church in New York City  
its Library.

The Reverend Authors named	Those Prospectus Treats distinguished	The Number of Volumes Lent
Mr Stackhouse's works off printed	New History of the Holy Bible	18 II. fol.
The Anonymous of New bridge University.	Concordance of the Holy Scriptures	I. - fol.
The late Bishop, Byles & Lord Geo	Antiquitates Christianae a postolicae fidei flos	I. - fol.
The worthy John A. Parker	Novo Antiquitatis Historiae the 7 <sup>th</sup> edition	I. - 2 <sup>to</sup>
The late R. Bishop Land	Conferentia with the flos	I. - 2 <sup>to</sup>

"The Number of Volumes Lettered." An artistic finish is intended in a valedictory, handsomely written in Latin, expressive of the donor's hope that the gift may prove useful; but the passage is so incomplete, not to say inaccurate, that it will not bear close scrutiny from intelligent readers. The whole is dated, churchly fashion, at the Feast of the Epiphany, January, 1743.

No further allusion to this Library, either in the church records or anywhere else, has come to light in the present investigation, prior to the sad chronicling of its virtually complete destruction in the great fire of September 21, 1776, when the charity schools and the rectory, as well as the sacred edifice itself, fell prey to the destroyer. The least item in the damage, the loss of the Library, was yet estimated as £200,<sup>1</sup> a very considerable sum for those days, even though a pound represented but about \$2.50 in New York currency. It would seem that the collection must have received additions other than the catalogue in the minutes records, for not over 425 volumes are there enumerated, and not all of these were lost.

A graphic account of this fire is given by Rector Inglis, who labored heroically to save the church property from destruction.<sup>2</sup> In some way a few of the books escaped annihilation. Besides the old Clarendon history in the Society Library, already mentioned, about twenty Elliston volumes are in existence to-day in the Library of the General Theological Seminary. Most of them are still adorned with his beautiful bookplate and the printed label, "His Gift to H. Trinity-Church Library

<sup>1</sup> Vestry minutes, I, 398.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Charles Inglis, D.D., to the Rev. Richard Hind, D.D., Oct. 31, 1776. Copy in S. P. G. rec-

ords and in Gen. Conv. Arch., N. Y. MSS; it is printed in *Doc. Hist. of N. Y.* Vol. III (1850), pp. 637-646.



in New-York City." In company with them is yet another interesting little book,<sup>1</sup> its fly-leaf bearing this significant inscription, "John Sharp May 6<sup>th</sup> 1714,"—of which more anon.

There is real romance in the story of what next befell this fire-spared remnant. In the words of Nathaniel F. Moore, president of Columbia College, when referring to the transfer of the Library and other effects of King's College to the City Hall in May, 1776:

Almost all the apparatus, and a large proportion of the books belonging to the College, were wholly lost to it in consequence of this removal; and of the books recovered, six or seven hundred volumes were so, only after about thirty years, when they were found, with as many belonging to the N. Y. Society Library, and some belonging to Trinity Church, in a room in St. Paul's Chapel, where, it seemed, no one but the Sexton had been aware of their existence, and neither he nor any body else could tell how they had arrived there.<sup>2</sup>

In consequence of this statement, the belief very naturally came to prevail that the books were in some way wholly hidden from the view and from the actual knowledge of all the church officers. In fact it has been solemnly assumed that the doorway to their place of repository was carefully walled up for their preservation!<sup>3</sup> But from press comments at the time the miscellaneous assortment was "discovered," it appears that even then the story—though not the collection—was pronounced

<sup>1</sup> *Warnings of the Eternal Spirit*, . . . London, 1712. Another work, *The Lawfulness and Expediency of Set Forms of Prayer, Maintained* (Robert Calder. N. p., 1706), bearing the same autograph and date, was presented to the Seminary in 1890, by the late Rev. Dr. Alfred

B. Beach, rector of St. Peter's Church.

<sup>2</sup> N. F. Moore. *An Historical Sketch of Columbia College*. New York, 1846. P. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan Dix, S.T.D. *Historical Recollections of St. Paul's Chapel*. New York, 1867. P. 43.



an invention, "a *hoax*"!<sup>1</sup> Upon investigation, the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* on December 14, 1802, gave the following explanation of current lively rumors:

There are in a room in the east corner of St. Paul's church, about two thousand volumes consisting chiefly of latin and English authors. They are the remains of a library presented by different persons to Trinity church, many years since, which were saved from the flames when that edifice was consumed, and were lodged in the hands of bishop Inglis. On his removal to Nova-Scotia (at the evacuation of this city by the British forces) they were conveyed from his house to St. Paul's church, where they have ever since remained. They were not forgotten, as reported, but have been visited frequently by bishop Provoost and others.

It would seem that "others" did indeed know of their existence prior to this date, for exactly a year previously Mr. John Pintard, one of the most public-spirited men of his day, had written in his diary:<sup>2</sup> "Conversed with Bishop Moore on forming a Theological Library under the auspices of Trinity Church." Enough of a stir, however, was occasioned by the newspaper disclosures for the college authorities to claim the neglected remnant of the King's College Library.<sup>3</sup> And friends of the Society Library no doubt as promptly recovered such of its property as could be identified, though the minutes of its Trustees do not mention the circumstance at all, in their brief chronicles of the few meetings held at that period.

Nearly twelve years passed before any further attention was paid to the old volumes still left in St. Paul's.

<sup>1</sup> The *Morning Chronicle*, N. Y., Dec. 13, 1802.

<sup>2</sup> These valuable MS. records are widely scattered. The sections referred to in the present volume are

in the possession of Mrs. E. B. Ser-voss, N. Y. city.

<sup>3</sup> At least one volume, however, was left behind and is now in the Library of the General Theological Seminary. See p. 99n2.



*Robert Elliston Gent. Comptrol:  
of his Majesty's Customs of  
New York in America.*

**HIS GIFT TO H. TRINITY-CHURCH LIBRARY  
IN  
NEW-YORK CITY.**

*Det Bine  
A. 21. 2.  
22.*

Robert Elliston bookplate (facsimile size), printed label and private inscription. See pp. 33, 34, 35-36.

Finally, at a Trinity vestry meeting on March 14, 1814, a letter was read from the Rev. Nathaniel Bowen, rector of Grace Church, "and others, a Committee in behalf of the New York Protestant Episcopal Library Society, praying a Transfer of the Books composing the Library now in Saint Paul's Chapel."<sup>1</sup> Without delay the request was granted, "on condition that the said Society become incorporated according to Law."<sup>2</sup>

Although in a twelve-page pamphlet, published in 1816 as "Extracts from the Minutes of the Protestant Episcopal Library Society of New-York,"<sup>3</sup> the Society is expressly declared to have "since become incorporated," no such record appears, either in the archives of the state or legislative departments at Albany, or upon the registers in the New York county clerk's office. So fragmentary are any allusions that can be found to this little association, a forerunner of the General Theological Seminary, that it may not be amiss to devote a paragraph or two to its consideration, justification for their insertion being found in the very circumstances of its origin. According to Mr. Pintard's journal for 1814:

On Wednesday evening, 30<sup>th</sup> March, several Clergymen & Lay-members of the protestant Episcopal Church in this city met in the Episcopal Charity School room to take into consideration the propriety of forming an Association having for its object

<sup>1</sup> Trinity vestry minutes, II, 262.

<sup>2</sup> In chronicling this incident in the lately published, elaborate history of Trinity parish, the statement is made that "The Society did become incorporated and is now the 'New York Society Library' on University Place"—an institution then of fully sixty years' standing! (Vol. II, p. 196.) Though this mistake is later corrected (Vol. IV, p. 533), a small error still lingers in

calling this Society "Literary" instead of "Library," as the original minutes of the vestry, and indeed its own printed by-laws, show clearly was its actual name.

<sup>3</sup> A copy is in the Library of the N. Y. Hist. Society. A slightly defective copy is in the Library of the General Seminary, bound up as "No. 34a" in a book of pamphlets, "283.7471,P19."



the collection of a Theological Library of all the most rare & valuable works in the various departments of sacred literature and science. Bishop Hobart presided—about 25 Gentlemen met. Rules prepared by the Rev<sup>d</sup> Doctor Bowen, who interests himself in this laudable pursuit, were reported & adopted, being similar & taken from the Rules for the Government of the N. York Society Library. The Admission Fee was fixed at Ten Dollars & Five Dollars annual dues. The meeting adjourned till Wed<sup>y</sup> 12 o'clock 13<sup>th</sup> April for election of Trustees.

The balloting resulted in the choice of Bishop Hobart as president ex officio, the trustees elected comprising the Rev. Dr. John Bowden, professor of rhetoric and belles-lettres in Columbia College, the Rev. Dr. Bowen, rector of Grace Church, the Rev. Dr. William Harris, rector of St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery and at the same time president of Columbia College, the Rev. Thomas Y. How and the Rev. Benjamin T. Onderdonk, assistant ministers of Trinity parish, the Rev. Dr. Samuel F. Jarvis, rector of St. Michael's, William Johnson and William Cutting, Esquires, lawyers of standing, and John Pintard, the prime mover of it all. His diary further records that a smaller gathering had been held on March 24th at Dr. Bowen's house, "to prepare Rules & Regulations for establishing a Library for the benefit of the Episcopal Clergy in this city . . . a Subject I have long had at heart, & on which I have often conversed with Doctor Bowen." Alluding to the old Parish Library, he says:

There is a small Library, established before the revolution, belonging to Trinity Church, which will be granted by the Vestry as the Basis of this institution. This Library consisting of donations may contain about 500. volumes of valuable Theological works. To the shame of Trinity Church [it] has never been



augmented but possibly been dilapidated. It is at present in a Chamber over the N. East door of St Pauls Church.



*Robert Elliston Gent Comptrol<sup>r</sup>  
of his Majesties Customs, of  
New York in America*

*By Whom these Devotional Offices  
are in beneficence given to the  
Parochial Library of Holy  
Trinity Church in N-York*

*City*  
*Li*

This historic old room<sup>1</sup> was long ago converted into a passageway to the gallery, but its dimensions cannot have been much changed, should any one wish to gaze upon the four walls which for so many years guarded portions of New York's early Libraries.

The Protestant Episcopal Library Society soon fulfilled its destiny,<sup>2</sup> becoming merged into the far better organized Protestant Episcopal Theological Society,<sup>3</sup> which in its turn gave rise to the General Theological Seminary. That numerous additions of books were received in the meantime is plain from a manuscript catalogue now in the General Seminary, and from a letter of John Pintard's to Bishop Hobart, dated March 14, 1822, in which he says: "The Books in St. Paul's, it is said, am<sup>t</sup> to 800 vs."; and of the entire collection, including 1000 volumes given to the Library during the early years of the Seminary in New Haven, he adds: "Considering the short period of the existence of the Sem<sup>y</sup> this number is far from contemptible, especially when their character & ponderosity are considered."<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore indeed fitting that the few survivors of this old Church of England Parish Library, founded in pious zeal for the use of the clergy, should be given a final asylum in the Library of an institution devoted to the training of young men for the Episcopal ministry.

<sup>1</sup> That it had a sacredness aside from the sentimental interest here ascribed to it, is plain from these words of Dr. Dix: "And now I have to mention the great glory of that ancient 'Library Room.' In it the General Theological Seminary was born; or there, at least, the first children were nurtured, and thence were they sent forth." P. 44, *Historical Recollections of S. Paul's Chapel, New York*.

<sup>2</sup> The treasurer's records, preserved

in the General Seminary, show a membership of 53 persons in 1817.

<sup>3</sup> "Hobart planned and organized a clerical association under the title of 'The Protestant Episcopal Theological Society.' From this as from a germ sprang our noble institution of learning, The General Theological Seminary." Morgan Dix. *History of Trinity Parish*. II, 236.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Morgan Dix. *History of Trinity Parish*. III, 272.

2. *The Sharpe Collection, given in 1713 to found a  
"Publick Library" at New York*

TURNING now from the story of the first New York Library,—which never was a Public Library at all,—as from a tale that is told, and retracing our steps almost to the same early date, we hear again the voice of one crying in the unlettered wilderness. The name of this personage, next summoned from the shadowy past, bears a closer relationship to the still far distant Society Library than founder or patron of the old Parish Library. The Rev. John Sharpe, D.D., is the individual; and his connection with New York begins in his appointment by Governor Cornbury, October 20, 1704, as "Chaplain of her Majesty's Forces in the Province of New York."<sup>1</sup> This date should dispose of the oft-recurring anachronism that Mr. Sharpe was chaplain to Lord Bellomont, for the latter died March 5, 1701, more than three years earlier, and in fact four months before Mr. Sharpe left England. Inasmuch as no sketch of this good man has ever been published, and as his career has a direct bearing on our narrative, it is pertinent to give here, in outline at least, the known facts of his pilgrimage.

The record of his early years is simply told in a few sentences as preface to his private diary, entitled "A Journal of my Life—Exteriour," in which it is written: "On May 15<sup>th</sup> 1680 I was born at the Church of Bourty in the Presbytery of the Garrioch in the Kingdom of Scotland My ffather M<sup>r</sup> Alexander Sharpe Minister of

<sup>1</sup> The Sharpe diary, however, gives the date of actual investiture as Oct. 19. His commission is recorded in full in "Commissions," III, 95,

in the office of the Secretary of State, Albany. A rough draft is in "N. Y. Col. MSS.," XLVII, 54, State Library.



Said parish and Anne Douglass his wife my mother." He was evidently a precocious and studious lad, for he was graduated Master of Arts from the University of Aberdeen at the age of eighteen, whereupon he began the study of theology privately in the city of Edinburgh. Most touching is the glimpse of sentiment and filial affection revealed in these simple words: "At 20 I left my Fathers house May 18<sup>th</sup> 1700 and was accompanied by him to Aberdeen where I received his blessing at parting on that spot of ground where his Father blest him when he went to Ireland." His ordination to the ministry at the hands of the Bishop of London occurred in March, 1701.<sup>1</sup> On July 3d he "came on board her Ma<sup>ties</sup> Ship Southampton bound for Virg<sup>a</sup> and arrived there Sept<sup>r</sup> 8, 1701," whence he presently proceeded to Maryland.

Thus John Sharpe at twenty-one began laboring in the American mission field as one of Dr. Bray's appointees and under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, just incorporated. So he doubtless became fully imbued with all Dr. Bray's plans, especially when settled where Parochial Libraries were most thickly planted. In 1702-1703 he was rector of Broad Neck parish, Anne Arundel county, and the next year at Snow Hill parish, Somerset county, both in Maryland. In May, 1703, with other clergymen he signed a petition "To his honour the President and Council," asking among other things "That Catalogues of Parochial Librarys be taken & sent to the Council."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These statements are confirmed by the records of the London See at Fulham Palace in *Liber Subscription*, 1699-1709, containing also the signature of Mr. Sharpe after the customary oaths of conformity, etc. His name also appears in the orig-

inal book of subscriptions to the Act of Uniformity, etc., in the same diocese, preserved in the Rawlinson MSS. (B. 375), in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, viz: "John Sharpe, Maryland, April 26, 1701."

<sup>2</sup> "Proceedings of the Council,



The diary<sup>1</sup> of John Sharpe, now in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, states that its second part was "begun at point Love in Chesapeack bay in the province of Mary Land March 1. 170 $\frac{3}{4}$ ," when its author was about to leave that section of the colonies. A partial explanation of his abrupt move comes from a wholly outside source in a letter from a Pennsylvania clergyman to the secretary of the S. P. G., dated March 20, 1704.<sup>2</sup> He says in part:

. . . & because Dear S<sup>r</sup> I have Sufficiently Experienced your Goodness, I dare open my whole Concern & fear, & that is this, I met w<sup>th</sup> one M<sup>r</sup> Sharp of Maryland, one who has been sent about 3 years since, he told me that D<sup>r</sup> Bray was his Friend, & procured a Support for him from that Honorable Body, but seems it was his Ill fortune to Quarrell w<sup>th</sup> D<sup>r</sup> Bray, since w<sup>ch</sup> time he has never rec<sup>d</sup> one Penny but the first £50. He has left Maryland, & thinks to settle in this Province or else in Burlington in E. Jersey. It is a Miserable thing if we that are so remote, stand Precarious to one Member's Displeasure. I could relate to you the most Surprising Storyes that I have had too sure reason to believe concerning D<sup>r</sup> B. of his Deportment towards the Principall Benef<sup>r</sup> our Church has in this Country, Coll<sup>l</sup> Nicholson Gov<sup>r</sup> of Virginia. You have undoubtedly heard Enough already, but you must Expect to hear a great deal More. [In a postscript he adds:] Since this was finished I hear that M<sup>r</sup> Sharp will take upon him the Itinerant office in M<sup>r</sup> Keith's Room.

1698-1731," *Archives of Maryland*. Baltimore, 1905. P. 160.

<sup>1</sup> A contemporary allusion to this journal appears in a letter from Col. Lewis Morris to Secretary Chamberlayne of the S. P. G., dated Feb. 20, 1711, in which he speaks of "Mr Sharp's narrative, who kept a Diary while in N York." *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, V, 318. Extracts from the journal have been published (though with errors) in *The Penna.*

*Mag. of Hist.*, vol. XXIII (1899), pp. 104-105; and also in a pamphlet by the Rev. Joseph Hooper, "The Church in Connecticut, 1705-1807," privately printed for the Commission on Parochial Archives of Conn., June, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Henry Nicols of Chester, Penna., to the Rev. Mr. Stubs, London. *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. I A (copies).

By May, 1704, the wanderer had arrived in New Jersey, and for the next five months was busy helping the Rev. John Talbot in the evangelical work begun by George Keith. A good idea of his enthusiasm and success is given in these extracts from a letter from Mr. Talbot to Mr. Keith, dated at New York, October 20th.

Mr Sharp was very zealous to bring y<sup>e</sup> Quakers to stand a Tryal, he carried one of y<sup>e</sup> Bombs<sup>1</sup> into their Meeting and read a new Challenge w<sup>ch</sup> I sent them to answer what they had printed. . . . Mr Sharp and I have gon y<sup>e</sup> rounds several times from Burlington to Amboy to Hopewell to Eliz:Town to Staten Island in our Turns with good Success, God be blessed, in all places. He had gather'd a Church himself at Cheesquaks where he preacht several times, & Baptiz'd about 40 ☿sons.<sup>2</sup>

Then, alluding to the chaplaincy, which had been first offered to himself, Mr. Talbot concludes:

Now I am alone for my Lord Cornbury has p<sup>r</sup>ferr'd him to be Chaplain of her Maties Fort and Forces at N. York. I saw his Co<sup>m</sup>ission sign'd this day, in y<sup>e</sup> Room of Mr Mott who dyed about 3. months agoe. I was loth to part with my good Friend and Companion in Travel, but considering how he had been disappointed at home I would not hinder his p<sup>r</sup>ferment abroad, hoping that y<sup>e</sup> good providence of God and y<sup>e</sup> venerable Society will supply his place.

Thus the young priest entered upon the last and longest period of his American ministry. His stipend as chaplain included board and lodging and £130 a year, payable weekly.<sup>3</sup> He was also directed by the governor

<sup>1</sup> A tract by the Rev. Francis Bugg.

<sup>2</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. II (copies), 1704-1706, no. xxiii. For his services in New Jersey, Mr.

Sharpe received £30 from the S. P. G. See *Letter Book*, vol. II (originals), 1704-1706, no. cxxix.

<sup>3</sup> "Mr Talbot to y<sup>e</sup> Society," London, March 14, 1705. *S. P. G. Letter*

to assist Mr. Vesey, who writes to the secretary of the S. P. G., February 26, 1705: “. . . nor do I now want an Assistant, for M<sup>r</sup> Sharp who since [he] had his Comission to be Chaplain of the Forces, is order'd by my L<sup>d</sup> Cornbury to assist me & to preach every Sunday.”<sup>1</sup>

Even a cursory glance through his little old “Journal” impresses one with the sense of John Sharpe’s having been an earnest, conscientious soul, tender and kind, without trace of envy or rancor, a true lover of his fellows. Fond of the open air and the water, he “walked a Shooting” and “went a fishing” with wholesome zest. Plainly of a genial temper, tactful and loyal, he continued at intervals to visit “my Lord” Cornbury in his durance in the debtors’ prison, up to the departure of that discredited nobleman, at whose wife’s funeral he had delivered an eloquent tribute.<sup>2</sup> He also won and held the esteem of his successor, Governor Hunter, and of such public leaders as Col. Lewis Morris, afterward chief justice, and Col. Caleb Heathcote, mayor of the city, as well as the regard of his own more intimate associates, Elias Neau, catechist, and William Huddleston, master of the charity school. On one occasion he acted as security for William Bradford, the printer, on a bond to the vestry of Trinity.<sup>3</sup> But social diversions and physical recreation could not interfere with his performance of duty, to judge by the monotonous entries, “at Study” and “preach’d.”

He seems to have been popular with his troops, whom

*Book*, vol. II A (copies), 1704-1706, no. cxlii.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, no. lxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> This sermon, printed by Bradford at New York in 1706, was twice reprinted at London, and sold “for the Benefit of the Poor.” A Brad-

ford copy is in the Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Copies of the reprints are less rare.

<sup>3</sup> “Journal,” March 13, 1711; corroborated in Trinity vestry minutes, I, 58, 81.



he accompanied on the expeditions of 1709 and 1711 against the French in northern New York. At times he addressed the Iroquois on religious topics, such ministrations being regularly supplemented with "a barrell of beer." For a large part of his term the old chapel in the

*A Journal of my Life - Exterior.*

On May 15<sup>th</sup> 1690 I was born at the Church of Bourly in the Par. of lory of the Garrison in the Kingdom of Holland. My father Mr. Alexander Sharpe Minister of that parish and Anne Douglass his wife my mother.

At nine years of age I was put under the Care of Mr. John Findlater Mr. of the Grammar School in New Aberdeen.

At 14. I was put under the Care of Mr. William Black professor of philosophy in Kings College Old Aberdeen where I stayed the usual term of four years and was made M. A. July 1698.

At 19 years I was sent to Edinburgh and by my Uncle Mr. Henry Douglas I was committed to Mr. George Camba professor of Divinity where I spent the summer.

At 20 I left my Fathers house May 10<sup>th</sup> 1700 and was accompanied by him to Aberdeen where I received his blessing at parting on that spot of ground where his Father slept him when he would die. So I came in company with my dear friend Mr. George John Minister of New Machar then out again by the Episcopal Clergy in the north to the parliament.

In June there was a great riot committed by a Rabble in the City from which I was delivered. &c.



fort was in a ruinous state; but, on its restoration by Governor Hunter in 1711,<sup>1</sup> he held services there regularly. During the interval he had made tours embracing Long Island and neighboring towns in New York and in a portion of Connecticut, to officiate in communities without church organization, thereby accomplishing, in the words of Elias Neau, "a great deal of good here these six Years."<sup>2</sup> His return from these little trips, as well as from longer ones, invariably brings out a fervent "*Deo Gratias*" in the journal.

On November 2, 1710, the good chaplain seems to have reached the acme of human happiness, to judge from an entry heavily underscored in scarlet: "This day I was married to my dearest *M<sup>rs</sup> Margarita Dreijer. Deo Gloria in Eternum.*" According to such evidence as is now available, this young woman was a daughter of Andries Draeyer (or Drauyer), a Dane,<sup>3</sup> who had commanded at Fort Albany in later days of Dutch rule, and who was an officer of the Dutch fleet in American waters. Another daughter, Anna Dorothea, became the wife of the Rev. Thomas Barclay, D.D., rector of St. Peter's Church at Albany,<sup>4</sup> whose son Henry, second

<sup>1</sup> "The Queens Chappel in the Fort, that from the time of Coll Fletcher till his [Gov. Hunter's] arrivall had been put to the several uses of Store house, Bear house, and work house, he took care to have decently fitted up and applyed to the use it was built for, and the Soldiers, who before were carried out of the Garrison and during the service stood for the most part in the Steeple, where they could but imperfectly hear, are now very well accommodated with Seats in the Chappel, where the service is regularly performed." Col. Morris to Secy. Chamberlayne, Feb. 20, 1711. *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, V, 320.

<sup>2</sup> Elias Neau to the Rev. John Chamberlayne, July 5, 1710. *S. P. G. Letter Book*.

<sup>3</sup> His wife was Gerritje Van Schaick, whose sister was the wife of the Rev. Bernardus Freeman, a Reformed Dutch minister at New Utrecht, L. I., and formerly a successful missionary among the Mohawks. He had been appointed by Gov. Bellomont until an English clergyman should be sent over.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Hooper. *A History of Saint Peter's Church in the City of Albany*. Albany, 1900. P. 63; also, R. Burnham Moffat. *The Barclays of New York*. New York, 1904. P. 51.

rector of Trinity Church, was to be in 1754 a member of the first board of Trustees of the New York Society Library.

The Sharpe diary, to its abrupt close in 1713, contains not a word about its author's literary tastes, let alone his private library or plans for a public institution. Nor is it till near the end of his sojourn in New York that his views on the subject begin to appear in his correspondence. In a long letter<sup>1</sup> to the secretary of the S. P. G., dated December 4, 1710, he says in part that it would be "highly conducive" to the work of the Society to have "provincial and parochial Librarys erected," "a great many good Collections of Books" having been sent to "the Metropolis of the several provinces of Maryland, Pensylvania, New York and Boston." If these collections were only "under good regulation, there would be considerable Additions made dayly by Charitable Persons here." To prevent the "Inconvenience" of the books' becoming scattered, "it wou'd be very Adviseable that there shou'd be Compleat Catalogues of the several parochial Librarys lodged in the hand of some Minister or Member of the Society, according to which the Libraries might be now and then reviewed and secured upon the death or removal of any of the Missionary's"; and, in case of additions through "the Benevolence of any here, it might be Notified to the Ven<sup>ble</sup> Society."

Coming to his personal interest in the matter, the chaplain continues:

Mr Talbot and I have talked of building a Superstructure, to which I will sell one part and dedicate the other of my small Library upon my death or removal from this Country. I have

<sup>1</sup>*S. P. G. Letter Book* (copies), in Gen. Conv. Arch., N. Y. MSS., I, vol. VI, 1710-1711, no. i. A copy is 230-232.

sent you a Catalogue of such as I wou'd sell to the Society (having others in my View to fill up the room). As for the price I leave it to be set by the Society's Book-seller, and if you agree to take them I shall give Orders where the Money shall be paid, and before such Order, upon the Intimation of your pleasure, shall deliver them to M<sup>r</sup> Talbot or any others you shall appoint, and transmit the receipt of them before I receive the Money.

He concludes with a request for "some hundred of the Society's Seal to ffix on the adverse page of the Titile page as is usual."<sup>1</sup>

Two years passed, however, without any action or further mention of the purpose in his heart, until March, 1713, when Governor Hunter granted him leave of absence, nominally "to see his aged Parent,"<sup>2</sup> but no less particularly to set forth "y<sup>e</sup> Posture of Ecclesiastical Affairs in these Provinces"<sup>3</sup> to the church authorities at home. He bore with him letters of high endorsement from the governor to English dignitaries. In one he is said to have "too much Sence to be Imposed on and too much Probity to Impose upon others,"<sup>4</sup> and in another characterized as "a very worthy, ingenious, and conscientious clergyman."<sup>5</sup> But a single jarring note appears to have been struck amid the general chords of approval. It sounds as follows from General Francis Nicholson, formerly governor of Virginia, in a commu-

<sup>1</sup> Not one volume of the Sharpe collection, however, bears an S. P. G. bookplate.

<sup>2</sup> His mother is of course meant, as the records of the Presbytery of Ellon, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, show that the Rev. Alexander Sharp died Feb. 20, 1709, his son, according to his journal, receiving on August 29th "ane account of my dear ffathers death & Br!" to which sad entry he adds in characteristic fashion "Requiem Eternam."

<sup>3</sup> Gov. Hunter to the Secretary, March 14, 1713. *S. P. G. Letter Book* (copies), vol. VIII A, 1712-1713, no. xv, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Gov. Hunter to Dean Swift, March 14, 1713. *Letters written by Jonathan Swift, D.D. . . . and Several of his Friends*. London, 1767. Vol. I, pp. 281-282. See also "The Rev. Mr. Sharpe to Dr. Swift," *ibid.*, pp. 320-321.



nication to the secretary of the S. P. G., from Boston, December 1, 1713, several months after John Sharpe's return to England:

I beg the Society will be pleased not to give intire Credit to any offer or Representation of the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Jn<sup>o</sup> Sharpe (late Chaplain to Her Majestys forces in N York Governm<sup>t</sup>) for himself or others without Good Authority and Proofs I knowing him to be a Person of double dealing &c and am Sorry I am not in London to call him to Acc<sup>t</sup> as a Deserter for running away from his Duty as Chaplain to the said Forces on the last Designed Expedition to Canada and more heartily Sorry to have this and many other things to lay to the charge of any Person in Sacred Orders.<sup>1</sup>

More in explanation of such language than of the charge conveyed, it must be said that Francis Nicholson, though a generous contributor to the interests of the church in Virginia and South Carolina, was jealous, passionate and headstrong in temperament, and far from deserving "intire Credit to any offer or Representation" he himself might make. Bitterly chagrined at the failure of his carefully planned expedition, he was only too ready to denounce any one connected with it. That his charge was unjust in this case is plain from the Sharpe diary, whose author left Camp Nicholson in September, 1711, because of illness, proofs of which, including a physician's "affadavit," were several times sent to the general.

It is evident that Chaplain Sharpe not only had kept in mind his Library plan but had been developing it all the while, and was to make its announcement one of the main objects of his visit to England. For, on the eve of

<sup>1</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. VIII, p. 525.



his departure, he drew up a remarkable paper, dated March 11, 1713, in which he declared it his intention to promote the establishment of "A Publick School," "A

( 2 )

New York. March. 11<sup>th</sup>. 1712/13

That this voyage which I now undertake may in some measure contribute to the glory of God and the good of his ~~Infant~~ Church in these parts, wherein I have now spent two or three years. I am resolved by the assistance of his Divine Grace, when I arrive in England to promote to the utmost of my power these three things.

1. A Publick School
2. A Publick Library
3. A Pious Chappel.

There is hardly any thing which is more wanted in this Country than Learning there being no place I know of in America where it is either less encouraged or regarded.

The City is so conveniently situated for Trade and the Genius of the people so inclined to Merchan-  
 = dise, that they generally seek no other Education for their children than writing and arithmetic so that Letters must be in a manner forced upon them not only without their seeking, but against their consent, and there is no doubt but as the youth

Publick Library" and "A Catechising Chappel" in the city of New York.

He mournfully explains that "There is hardly any thing which is more wanted in this Countrey than learning there being no place I know of in America where it is either less encouraged or regarded." This sad condition he accounts for in the following words, which suggest an applicability to New York in less remote times. "The City," he says, "is so conveniently Scituated for Trade and the Genius of the people so inclined to merchandise, that they generally seek no other Education for their children than writing and arithmetick. So that letters must be in a manner forced upon them not only without their seeking, but against their consent."

After elaborating his theories of founding and governing schools, he proceeds to "The Library," saying: "Another thing which is very much wanted here is a publick Library, which would very much advance both learning and piety. Such there are at Charles Town in Carolina, Annapolis in Mary Land, at Philadelphia and Boston. Some books have been formerly sent to New York but as *parochial* they remain in the hands of the Incumbent." In contradistinction to this last-named—at once recognizable as the Library of Trinity parish—the proposed institution should be "publick and provincial" and "open every day in the week at convenient hours," when "all men may have liberty to read in the Library." As evidence of his advanced ideas, it need only be said that the Society Library, founded in 1754, was not made accessible daily until 1791.

Eight regulations are suggested, by which, in addition to the above, it appears that the use of the books and the lighting should be free, though each borrower of a vol-

ume must "sign to a receipt or obligation to return it at such a time," for which the librarian was to receive sixpence. Also, the subscription element was to be purely voluntary, a book to "ly on the table where it may be lawful for others to subscribe books or money." A catalogue, signed by the governor, the mayor and a clergyman, must be sent to the English primate; and like the Bray libraries the proposed institution must be visited once in three years by these same officials, who should "certify the improvements or Embezelments to the Trustees in England to be appoynted by his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London."

His plan expands, amazing in its scope, as he beholds the Library "a Repository of all such Rarities as the Countrey produces, or are brought hither from other places to be communicated to the Ingenious in Europe." It might as well comprise also "a small garden of rare and Exotick plants to send yearly some to the curious in England and have others in Exchange."<sup>1</sup> And he was desirous to have the Library under the same roof as the

<sup>1</sup> There is in this proposition not a little resemblance to the scheme of the celebrated Frenchman, Alexandre Vattemare, for "an international exchange of all that is valuable in science, literature, natural history and the fine arts—and the establishment in every nation and state of an *institution* (under the fostering care of its government), to receive these exchanges, forming not only a *museum* illustrative as well of the powers of nature, as of the state of perfection to which the productions of the human mind and hand have arrived, or are tending to in every quarter of the globe, but a kind of *patent office*, where the creations of the industry, the achievement of the intellect, of the inventive faculties, and of govern-

ments of each country, may at once and always be assigned to their true origin, and always verified without doubt or difficulty." Address of M. Vattemare before the two houses of the N. Y. Legislature, Oct. 20, 1847. This was a mission he had been conducting for twenty years with fitful success. It was in consequence of his securing to the city of New York, in 1848, for example, a "splendid case of valuable medals, commemorative of interesting events during the administration of" Pope Pius IX, that the present City Library was instituted in the City Hall by the local authorities in January, 1849. See *Proceedings of the Boards of Aldermen and Assistant Aldermen approved by the Mayor*. Vol. XVI. New York, 1849.



school, for it would be "a motive to the Industry and application of the scholars when they see so good provision made for their Studys." O Chaplain, great was thy faith!

The innate sincerity and goodness of the man shine out in the concluding passages, in which he avows his long-cherished resolve to bestow "for a foundation or beginning to this Library . . . all my own books, which I now have or may have at the time of my decease or leaving of that countrey, which shall be put up in it how soon it is fitted to receive them"; for, he pathetically acknowledges, "the undertaking looks so formidably great (at first) that something must be done to make it seem possible." Modestly reserving for himself "during life or stay in the countrey free access" to the Library of his dreams, "and leave to borrow . . . under the same restrictions and limitations as others," he reverently entreats in closing: "So God prosper the work."

Appended to the "Proposals" is a catalogue of his precious collection, "intended to be given as a foundation of a Publick Library at New York," comprising 146 volumes, of which 105 appear to have been left behind by the donor. They are classified much like the Bray collections, as follows:

I the holy Scriptures, 9; II Criticks and Commentators, 20; III Fathers and Schoolmen, 20; IV Discourses, Apologetical, 6; V Ecclesiastical History, Chronology, Chorography, 4; VI Body's of Divinity, 18; VII Practical Divinity, 24; VIII Controversial Tracts, 11; IX Philology, History, &c, 18; X Devotional, 16.

These books were left with his friend Elias Neau, until the passage of an act of assembly, which he confidently



predicts "can be easily obtained to secure the said Library for ever."<sup>1</sup>

The original manuscript is now in the Library of Lambeth Palace.<sup>2</sup> A somewhat defective copy, now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, contains a dedicatory page, dated in London, July 11, 1713, and thus inscribed:

To THE MOST Reverend Fathers in God the Arch Bishops, To the Right Reverend the Bishops, To the Reverend the Clergy. And to all the Learned and pious Patrons and Promoters of Piety and Learning in the Kingdom of Great Britaine

This following Proposal as a means of its Advancement in the Province of New York and other parts of America

Is most humbly dedicated and with most profound Respect and Deference to their Godly Wisdom, is intirely Submitted by,

Their most faithfull Servant and ffellow-Labourer in Christ Jesus our Lord and Master

JOHN SHARPE Chaplaine to her Majestys Garisons in the province of New York.<sup>3</sup>

The catalogue attached to this copy is dated May 15, 1715, and enumerates 238 volumes, including those left behind, "given towards laying the Foundation of a Publick Library at New York in America." This statement of actual gift is borne out by the final paragraph: "London July 15<sup>th</sup> 1715. To the Glory of God and the Advancement of true Religion and Virtue in the Infant Church of America I do freely and heartily give & resign at this time all the above mention'd books." The

<sup>1</sup> From his copy of 1715.

<sup>2</sup> The MS. itself bears no label or endorsement. In the Lambeth catalogue it is in vol. 841, "Proposals for erecting a School, Library and Chapel at New York, 1712-13." The paper was printed in full in the *Collections of the New York*

*Historical Society for 1880*, though a comparison of its text with photographs of the original document discloses variations in spelling, etc.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of this copy is in the *S. P. G. Letter Book*, "Letters Received," vol. X A (copies), 1714-1715.

additional volumes were despatched oversea for Elias Neau to put with those already in his hands, the whole collection being thereupon formally presented by Dr. Sharpe, as he had then become, to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in trust for a Public Library.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his sanguine expectation and efforts of the Venerable Society, seconded by Elias Neau and Chaplain Jenney,<sup>2</sup> and notwithstanding the evident favor of Governors Hunter and Burnet in turn, no measure to establish the proposed Library by statute seems even to have come before the provincial legislature.<sup>3</sup> In May, 1723, Governor Burnet wrote to Secretary Humphreys of the S. P. G. that he had received the books from Mr. Neau, but that he feared it would "take some time to bring the Assembly into the Notion of a Publick Library."<sup>4</sup>

So the little collection remained with the governor. In all likelihood it was examined by young Benjamin Franklin when entertained by Burnet in 1724, for in his autobiography Franklin says: "The then governor of New York, Burnet (son of Bishop Burnet), hearing from the captain that a young man, one of his passengers, had a great many books, desir'd he would bring me to see him. . . . The gov'r. treated me with great civility, show'd me his library, which was a very large one, and we had a good deal of conversation about books and authors."<sup>5</sup> It is natural to suppose that their talk

<sup>1</sup> Basis for these statements is found in the correspondence between Elias Neau, Gov. Hunter, Gov. Burnet, et al. and the secy. of the S. P. G., in the *S. P. G. Letter Books*.

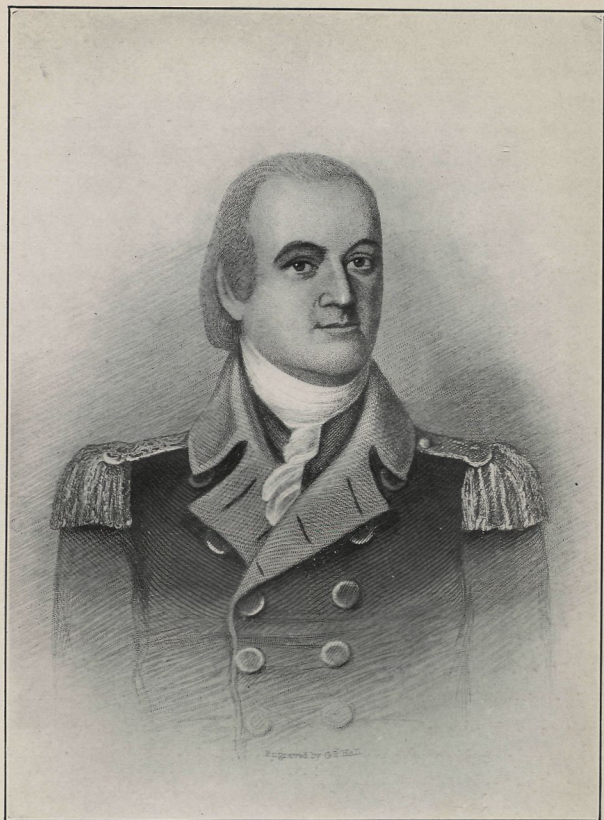
<sup>2</sup> See p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> This fact is established by a vain search through "Bills which failed

to become Laws, 1685-1770." MS. no. 44, State Library, Albany.

<sup>4</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. XVII A (copies), 1722-1723, pp. 230-231.

<sup>5</sup> *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*. Edited by John Bigelow. New York, 1887. Vol. I, pp. 73-74.



Hon. William Alexander (Major-General Lord Stirling)

Organizer, 1754. Trustee, 1754-1756





embraced a discussion, not merely of the Sharpe plans, but also of the general "Notion of a Publick Library."

Whether or not Franklin, "the father of social libraries in this country,"<sup>1</sup> in listening to the proposals of poor Chaplain Sharpe, then and there received the inspiration that eventually led him to organize a library in his adopted home, is of course purely a matter for conjecture. His institution, which he calls "the Philadelphia public library"<sup>2</sup> and "the mother of all the North American subscription libraries,"<sup>3</sup> was founded in 1731 and formally chartered eleven years later as The Library Company of Philadelphia, and is to-day the largest as well as the oldest Proprietary Library in the United States.

There is nothing, however, in Franklin's available writings to confirm or even to suggest any indebtedness to Sharpe. And if such a surmise should ever prove true, ahead of Sharpe appears the primal genius of Bray; while, moreover, Franklin's own birthplace, Boston, possessed a "publike Library" in its town house prior to 1675.<sup>4</sup> Nor would our great savant's reputation for originality suffer by such an admission. His acuteness of perception, no less than his public spirit, is revealed in his successfully adapting the ineffectual plans of Bray and Sharpe (for institutions publicly supported) to the subscription scheme, in which movement he is regarded as the pioneer of the English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup>

To return to John Sharpe in closing. Unfortunately

<sup>1</sup> *Free Public Libraries*, a pamphlet published by the American Social Science Association. Boston, 1871. P. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*. Edited by John Bigelow, N. Y., 1887. Vol. I, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 159.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 4n2.

<sup>5</sup> Ainsworth R. Spofford. *A Book for All Readers*. New York, 1900. P. 299.

his last years are at the present writing shrouded in obscurity. Soon after his return from America, he took his doctor's degree in divinity, January 6, 1714, at his loved alma mater, King's College in the University of Aberdeen, his thesis being "a latine discourse upon some subject in theologie."<sup>1</sup> In June of that year he innocently fell among thorns in suffering himself to be "forcibly presented" by two of his Aberdeen faculty into the pulpit of Old Machar, where he gave further offence by using the Anglican ritual. In the justiciary process that ensued at Edinburgh, he was sentenced to be "incapable of enjoying any parish Church Stipend or Benefice within Scotland for the Space of Seven years,"—in effect a virtual decree of banishment from his native heath.<sup>2</sup>

The next known of him is that in 1717 he published a treatise in London, a work of a scholarly and deeply religious character.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime he had resigned the chaplaincy at New York, his successor, the Rev. Robert Jenney, receiving a commission from King George I, dated September 17, 1717.<sup>4</sup> Then comes a melancholy allusion to "the late Dr Sharpe, once Chaplain to the Garrison," in a letter written by Secretary Humphreys to Governor Burnet in June, 1722.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the faculty minutes, King's College, Aberdeen, Jan. 2, 1714. The thesis, a 16-page pamphlet, entitled *De Rebus Liturgicis*, was printed at Aberdeen the same year. A copy is in the Library of Glasgow University.

<sup>2</sup> See *Officers and Graduates of University and King's College, Aberdeen, MVD-MDCCCLX*. Aberdeen, 1893; also, MS. "Justiciary Decisions, Edinburgh, 1710-1721," vol. II. (Copy in Society Library.)

<sup>3</sup> *The Charter of the Kingdom of*

*Christ, explain'd in Two Hundred Conclusions and Corollaries, from the Last Words of our Blessed Lord to his Disciples* . . . London, 1717. A copy is in the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> "Grant Warrants," Colonial Office, London. Vol. XV, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> A puzzling allusion to Dr. Sharpe appears in a letter from the Rev. John Milne of Albany to the S. P. G., dated June 20, 1728. Referring to his predecessor, Dr. Barclay, he says: "The prejudices which

It is sad indeed, not only that the date of death and the burial-place of this first proposer of a free Public Library in New York are unknown, but also that the last days of so public-spirited a man should have been spent in poverty and neglect. For it appears from letters of Governor Burnet and Elias Neau that he had become so destitute as to have written to the latter, in the spring of 1721, asking piteously for the return of his as yet un-established Library "to get a little Money to subsist on," being "very poor" and "reduced to a state of misery." More important a date to posterity than that of his death, however, is the year 1713, when a Public Library was first proposed in New York; and a higher sentiment than even a gravestone could evoke lingers about the remains of John Sharpe's beloved collection to-day, in their last quiet resting-place in the New York Society Library.

How and when these books, now numbering 124 volumes under 104 titles,<sup>1</sup> actually became a part of the Society Library, cannot confidently be told at the present writing, notwithstanding long and diligent search, for the records of that institution are absolutely mute on the subject. The following theory as to their history is suggested as tenable, at least until the facts come to light. In the first place they seem never to have formed a part of the Trinity Parish Library, as the catalogue of that collection includes comparatively few of their titles, and those the common ones of the day. It is probable, then, that they were joined to the Corporation Library,

he and one Sharp his brother-in-law, who is since gone to the Church of Rome, have given too just ground for, are like to be the greatest obstacles I shall meet with in this

place." (Copy in Gen. Conv. Arch., N. Y. MSS., vol. II, pp. 18-20.)

<sup>1</sup>The Sharpe Collection to-day comprises 49 folios, 3 quartos, 13 octavos, 13 duodecimos and 46 of smaller fold.



on its arrival and opening in 1730, Governor Burnet having no doubt left them in trust to his successor, Governor Montgomerie.

In 1754, when the Society Library was founded and was allowed to store its new collection in the City Hall, on condition of caring for the worn-out Corporation Library, permission was given also to box up books held to be "of no Service & scarce ever read." Many of the Sharpe tomes would have answered this description as perfectly then as now, and may well have been the ones meant. So, when such few books as the vandals spared in 1776 were hastily given sanctuary in St. Paul's Chapel, it was an easy matter to carry the boxes to that place of safety. Otherwise it would be hard to explain how the collection should have been preserved comparatively intact.

After slumbering a generation longer, the books at last saw the light again upon the opening of that room. From what will be said later, it is plain that no portion of the Corporation Library shared this captivity. But, as the Sharpe books bore no S. P. G. bookplate and yet were known to have been under the control of the "City Library," as the Society Library was commonly called in its early years, it is probable that they were at once handed over to that institution, on the release and distribution of the long-imprisoned collections in 1802. That they were preserved in St. Paul's Chapel seems reasonably certain from the fact, already mentioned, that a single volume bearing John Sharpe's name has been kept for years with the relics of the Trinity parochial collection. The probability also is that together with them went, naturally enough, the old Clarendon history, doubtless because it also bore no S. P. G. bookplate and



chiefly because of its label, "Belonging to y<sup>e</sup> Library of New York in America," which, with the character of the book, would not readily suggest its former connection with the Parish Library. The dominant fact, however, is this: the Sharpe books and this Clarendon history came to the Society Library sometime between 1800 and 1813, for they are enumerated for the first time in the catalogue of the latter year.

As for these venerable books themselves, each of the weary-looking volumes displays on fly-leaf or title-page the good chaplain's autograph, written in a variety of ways, as "Johannis Sharpe," "Joh: Sharpe," and "John Sharp," together with the year of acquisition in each case. It appears he dropped the final "e" after leaving America; but it is retained in this work for the reason that he so spelled his name during his residence in New York, and on his Proposals. In some of the books occurs also this motto, "*Ad quid venisti?*," which may convey a choice of meanings according to the emphasis in the modern translation, "What have you come to?" Is it a lamentation or a jest, or may it not be simply, to quote the Proposals, "on the title page or cover such inscription badge or Impression as the Trustees shall appoynt."

In response to the natural query why the idea of a Public Library as proposed by Dr. Sharpe did not strike root in New York, it may be replied that in the narrow and jealous view of the average provincial assemblyman<sup>1</sup> it was merely an administrative measure, which would call for annual appropriations from the treasury,

<sup>1</sup> Governor Hunter wrote to Dean Swift from New York, March 14, 1713, in the same letter in which he spoke so highly of John Sharpe: "Here is the finest air to live upon

in the universe. And if our trees and birds could speak, and our assemblymen be silent, the finest conversation too." See p. 51n5.

besides giving a purchase for interference from the executive or from the home government at some future time. Furthermore, as in the case of the earlier Parish Library, the proposed institution would be under Anglican control largely, a prospect none too pleasing to the "Dissenters" of the Dutch Church, still in a strong majority. But above all else, there had not as yet been developed the proper intellectual activity to offer sympathy and support to the plan. Like Dr. Bray, John Sharpe was far in advance of his times.

### *3. The Millington Bequest, or the Corporation Library, 1730-1776*

LITTLE as the Knickerbocker of the early 18th century may have relished the growing influence of the established church, and reluctant as he certainly was to further—not to say active in trying to thwart<sup>1</sup>—the worthy objects attempted in her name, the fact remains that to one of the organizations sanctioned by the Church of England is due the credit for founding the first Public Circulating Library in New York. It came about in this wise.

On the 25th of March, 1728, there died in Kensington, England, the Rev. John Millington, D.D., for the past twenty-three years rector of St. Mary's at Stoke Newington, a parish in Middlesex, about three miles north of

<sup>1</sup>Elias Neau, catechist to the negroes, complained bitterly of a city ordinance of March, 1713, "for Regulating Negro & Indian Slaves in the Night Time,"—by which they were forbidden to appear on the streets an hour after sunset without lighted "Lanthorns,"—as an in-

tended "obstacle to stop the Designs of the Illustrious Society [S. P. G.]," and as "a Snare" for his school. Mr. Neau to the Rev. John Chamberlayne (contemporary translation), Sept. 8, 1713. *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. VIII, p. 173.

London. He had also held the titles and offices of fellow of Magdalen Hall, Cambridge, chaplain to the Bishop of London, vicar of Kensington and prebendary of Newington. Always generous to the church and toward his own parish, at his death he left handsome bequests to religious work. Among his beneficiaries was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, of which body he had long been a member, as also one of its early officers.<sup>1</sup>

In its annual abstract of proceedings for 1729, the statement is made that he had bequeathed to the Society £200 "and all his Books, being a very valuable Library, which Books he desires should be sent together to the Plantations in *America*; and the Society have agreed to send them to *New York*, as soon as an Act of Assembly shall be passed for their due Preservation."

The Society had acted promptly, despatching a letter dated September 23, 1728, to Governor Montgomerie. This notification he took nearly a year to answer, until he could give "a satisfactory account of the proceedings of the General Assembly." After returning thanks, he calls attention to enclosed copies of the action taken by the legislature and by the Common Council of the city to "effectually provide for the reception and preservation of the Books." He requests the exact "dementions" of the gift, lest the authorities should "fall into some mistake" in preparing accommodations; and closes with a promise "to have the room so contrived, that it may be enlarged in case the Library encreases."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For sources see the various S. P. G. "Abstracts" (the N. Y. Hist. Soc. has a complete set); William Robinson. *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Stoke Newington* . . . London, 1842; and *Novum Re-*

*portorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* . . . Compiled by George Hennessy. London, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Governor Montgomerie to the Rev. David Humphreys, D.D., secretary of the S. P. G., Aug. 29, 1729.



Meanwhile, June 24, 1729, the assembly had listened to the S. P. G. letter, as read by Speaker Adolph Philipse, designating the collection to be "a Library, from which the Clergy and Gentlemen of this Government, and *Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut*, might borrow Books to read, upon giving Security to return them within a limitted Time." No doubt murmurings of high pleasure passed from one to another at the favoring discrimination shown their community, "in prefering it before any of his Majesty's other Plantations on this Continent, to reposit a Library in," an institution that would "not only redound to the Reputation of this Colony, but be vastly useful and beneficial to the Inhabitants thereof."<sup>1</sup> But before passing any resolutions the Common Council must be heard from.

With praiseworthy despatch the city fathers convened three days later to act in their turn. Mayor Lutting was promptly requested to thank the "Honourable House" for its message, and to say they were "truely sensible of the great Advantages which may arise from so Generous and seasonable a present," which they were "zealously disposed to Receive." They agreed "to provide a large Room," and were "inclin'd" to prepare "Shelves, Desks, Seats and Other Accommodations," when the precise extent of the collection should be ascertained.<sup>2</sup>

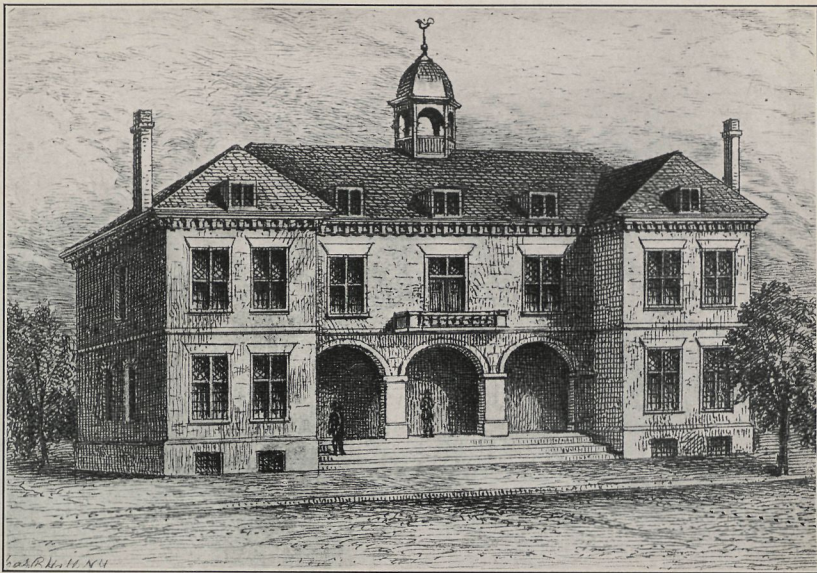
After an interval of ten months, on April 22, 1730, the Common Council was informed of the arrival of twenty-

*S. P. G. Letter Book* (originals), vol. I B, no. 57.

<sup>1</sup>*Journal of the Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Colony of New-York, 1691-1743.* Printed by Hugh Gainé. New York, 1764. Vol. I, p. 601.

<sup>2</sup>*Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675-1776.* New York, 1905. Vol. III, p. 475. The original letter with signatures is in the *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. I B, no. 57a. See p. 71.





Old City Hall, Wall Street facing Broad Street, as erected, 1700

Remodeled as Federal Hall, 1788; demolished, 1812. Home of the Corporation Library, the first Public Circulating Library in New York, 1730–1776, and of the New York Society Library, 1754–1776. Site of present Sub-Treasury Building



three cases containing 1642 volumes, "for a Publick Library for this City,"<sup>1</sup> brought over in the good ship *Alexander*, Dennis Downing, master, and "ready to be landed and delivered." A committee of five (including John Roosevelt, an ancestor of President Roosevelt, and John Chambers, later a member of the first board of Trustees of the Society Library) was directed to receive the books and put them in the City Hall. Also, should they "find Occasion," they were "to Open the Said Cases and Cause the Said Books to be wiped and Cleaned and an Inventory thereof to be taken." Lastly they were to "Consider of a proper place for the said Library," and to estimate the cost of its installation.

At the next meeting of the Corporation, early in June, the committee announced with almost childish precision:

We did Receive the above mentioned twenty three Cases of Books Containing Sixteen hundred and forty two Volumes: which Cases we Opened and took the Books out and put them in the Assembly Room of which Alderman Philipse has the Key.. And we are of Opinion that the Room Opposite to the Common Council Room in the City Hall<sup>2</sup> will be a proper place for depositing the Said Books and that the same be made Convenient

<sup>1</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV, 10.

<sup>2</sup> This structure, the second of the three City Halls, was erected in 1700 on the site of the present sub-treasury building at the junction of Wall and Nassau streets, facing Broad. It is thus described in the year 1756: "The City Hall is a strong Brick Building, two Stories in Height, in the Shape of an Oblong, winged with one at each End, at right Angles with the first. The Floor below is an open Walk, except two Jails and the Jailor's Apartments. The Cellar underneath is a Dungeon, and the Garret above a

common Prison. This Edifice is erected in a Place where four Streets meet, and fronts, to the South-west, one of the most spacious Streets in Town. The Eastern Wing, in the second Story, consists of the Assembly Chamber, a Lobby and a small Room for the Speaker of the House. The West Wing, on the same Floor, forms the Council Room and a Library; and in the Space between the Ends, the *Supreme Court* is ordinarily held." William Smith. *The History of the Province of New-York*. London, 1757. P. 194.



as soon as may be but the manner of doing thereof we humbly Refer to the Consideration of this Board.<sup>1</sup>

Its report being at once approved, the committee was ordered to "Employ Workmen and Purchase Materialls for fitting up a Convenient Room or Chamber," as recommended, "for Containing the said Library with Convenient Shelves and Desks Nessessary thereunto."<sup>2</sup>

On July 20th Governor Montgomerie wrote briefly again to Secretary Humphreys of the Society, renewing appreciation and assurances that the Corporation would treat the gift with "great Care."<sup>3</sup> Two days later the Common Council, after ordering a receipt to the Rev. Mr. Vesey—still rector of Trinity Church, and since 1714 the S. P. G. commissary for New York—for the cases of books, and directing the same committee to have a catalogue made and to have the books cleaned and put into the "Library Room," requested Recorder Harison to "prepare the Draft of a letter of thanks &c, . . . then to be fair drawn, signed by the Mayor,"<sup>4</sup> and sent abroad. This epistle, of the same date, informed the Society that there had been "furnished and Compleated an handsome large Room for the Reception of them and a much greater Number whenever we shall be so happy to see any Addition made to this their Noble Benefaction!"<sup>5</sup> In conclusion they said: "The Approaching session of Assembly Encourages us to hope that we shall be Enabled to take all proper Measures for the Preservation of this Library, and the Keeping it in such Manner as may best Answer the Intention of the Donors, in all which worthy purposes we have already received (and

<sup>1</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book* (copies), vol. XXIII A, no. 11, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV, 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.



have further Assurances of) his Excellencys Patronage and Encouragement."

Nevertheless, Governor Montgomerie seems never to have formally recommended that the assembly should confirm the Library by statute, nor did that body ever carry out its intention, expressed June 27, 1729, "to pass an Act for the due preservation of the Books when here."<sup>1</sup> These particulars have been given to show that the legislature took no active part in the establishment of the first Public Library in New York city; that in this important event "home rule" was not questioned. And further, inasmuch as the Corporation met all the contingent costs of the new enterprise,—amounting altogether to fully £85,<sup>2</sup> a very respectable sum for that day, especially in view of the really small size of the collection,—it was only natural that the institution should come to be called the Corporation Library—that is to say, controlled by the Corporation of the city, technically termed "The Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York."

The appointment of a librarian finds no mention in the minutes of the Common Council for some years. In several histories of New York city it is asserted that the Rev. John Sharpe, "still living," was put in charge, but "being an aged man did not long survive his appointment."<sup>3</sup> Even were he then living,—which does not seem probable, from the statement to Governor Burnet already quoted,—he would have been only just fifty years of age. This tradition is perhaps based on the probable union of the old Sharpe collections with the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of . . . General Assembly*, I, 602.

<sup>2</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV, 16, 25, 61, 63, 145, 304, 348, 352, 407,

453, 480; V, 8, 55, 299. A pound in New York currency equaled \$2.50.

<sup>3</sup> *E. g.*, see p. 6.

newly started Public Library, thus at last identifying his name with the object so long his heart's desire. But there can be found no evidence to prove that he had ever returned to America, while there *is* evidence that points to his having died in London prior to 1723.<sup>1</sup> One might think that Mrs. Martha J. Lamb, the historian, not merely as a careful investigator would have discovered the person first named as "Library Keeper," but would have been only too ready to publish his name, which was — Alexander Lamb.

This individual, of whom very little is known save that he later served on the city watch, began in November, 1734, a term of eight years as "Keeper of the Library," at a salary of £3 (\$7.50) per annum till raised to £4 (\$10) in 1737.<sup>2</sup> What his duties were, to merit this not excessive allowance, we do not know; but doubtless, to judge from later regulations, he was required, besides keeping the room and shelves in order, to be present in the "Library Room" for a short time once or twice a week to give out or to receive books. As the very title implies, however, one did not need to be a man of great literary intelligence simply to be a "Keeper."

Before Mr. Lamb's appointment, the Rev. Richard Charlton, assistant at Trinity Church, had in June, 1733, been granted by the Common Council "Liberty to make A Key to the Library of this City for his own use, and none Others, he promising to make a Catalogue of the Said Library, and properly to place the Books therein, thereby to Render the same more Easy to be found and more usefull, he also promising not to suffer any Books whatsoever to be taken from thence without the direction

<sup>1</sup> See p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV,

304, 305, 348, 407, 453, 480; V, 8, 55, 83, 299.

19<sup>th</sup> August 1724

To the Honourable the House of Representatives of the  
Colony of New York in General Assembly convened

At Speaker

W<sup>th</sup> the Mayor Recorder Aldermen and Assistants of the  
City of New York convened in Common Council are very thankful  
for the message sent down to us by the Honourable House concerning  
a proper Repository for the Library of the Reverend D<sup>n</sup> Milington  
Offered to this Province by the Honorable the Society for propagation of  
the Gospel. We are truly sensible of the great Advantage which  
may arise from so generous and seasonable a present. And we are  
zealously disposed to Receive the same, and in Order thereto we do  
Resolve to provide a large Room for their Accommodation which shall  
be at any time hereafter ready for that Purpose; but as we are ignorant  
at present of what volume the said Library does consist, we cannot  
put that Room into the Repository Order by preparing Shelves Docks  
Seats and Other Accommodations as we are inclined to do  
The Confirmation and Enjoyment of this favour we hope for, from  
the Recommendations and Assistance of his Excellency the  
Governour and the Honourable House and we will not be wanting  
on our parts to deserve the same Dated at the City Hall the twenty  
seventh day of June in the third year of his Majestys Reign Anno -  
Dom 1729

Rob<sup>t</sup>: Lutting

Wm: Harrison

John Fugger

Phillip: Corland

Wm: Phillips

Gerard: Surveant

Ant<sup>h</sup>: Rutgers

John: Zeebe

Obad: Thurn

Egbert van Doornum

Samuel L. Pop



and Licence of this Corporation.”<sup>1</sup> There has survived no copy of this catalogue (if it was ever printed), nor any evidence to prove that it was actually prepared. Previous to this entry the only reference to the subject occurs under date of July 13, 1732, when one Cornelius Lodge, a whilom city collector and surveyor, was ordered paid £5 “for attending and Cleaning the Books in the Library.”<sup>2</sup> This ambiguous passage may be taken to mean that he was its first though transient custodian. To how large an extent the books circulated during these early years there is no means of telling. But that they did circulate is plain enough from subsequent calls for missing volumes.

With the cessation of Mr. Lamb’s ministrations in the Library in the fall of 1742, his not over-tempting office was without incumbent for a season. There is nothing to indicate that any additions to the collection had been forthcoming, while in the dozen years of its existence no doubt the more alluring of the worthy Dr. Millington’s books had been read, if not re-read, by those who cared for the printed page at all. So a very natural languor fell upon the still youthful institution.

Suddenly in the year 1745 a stir was felt. On April 19th the Common Council was presented with a business-like memorial from an enterprising young man, James Parker, a former apprentice of William Bradford and for the past four years partner of Benjamin Franklin under the terms of a six-year agreement, “for the Carrying on the Business of Printing in the City of New-York.”<sup>3</sup> It would seem that Franklin must have been

<sup>1</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, IV, 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 145.

<sup>3</sup> The Articles of Indenture are given in full in the “Proceedings” of

the Mass. Hist. Soc. for May, 1902 (as quoted by Worthington C. Ford from the original MS. in the possession of the American Philosoph-



fully cognizant of this new venture, if indeed he had not urged it upon his partner, as would not be at all improbable. Unfortunately, however, their available correspondence begins in September, 1747, after Parker had given up all hope of success with the Library.<sup>1</sup> The preamble of his petition reads as follows:

*Whereas* the Corporation is possessed of a Valuable Library which May be of very Great Use And Service to the Inhabitants of the Province, but More Especially to those of the City, if a Library keeper was Appointed Under proper Regulations, the want of which at present Not only deprives Many persons of the Use of the Said Books, But Subjects the Books to be hurt Or Destroyed by the Dust and paper Worm, WHEREFORE James Parker Printer for this Government Humbly proposes to Take the Care And Charge of the Said Library As Library keeper during the pleasure of the Corporation.<sup>2</sup>

His proposed "Terms and Regulations" are in brief as follows: 1st, to "Compleat a true and perfect Catalogue . . . and Print the Same in a handsome Manner on or before the first day of August next," with "his receipt for the Books therein"; 2d, that he be empowered to loan books at sixpence a week, under certain limitations and penalties, to "persons Resideing within this Government," such "Hirers Entring into a Penalty in Double the Value of Each Book with Security if Required"; 3d, that the extent of loans be between a week and a month, no person to have more than three books at once; 4th, that members of the Common Council "be Entituled to the Loan of any Book Gratis And be pre-

ical Society of Philadelphia). Boston, 1903. 2d series, vol. XVI, pp. 186-189.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-232, Letters from

James Parker to Benjamin Franklin, 1747-1770.

<sup>2</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, V, 142.

ferred before all other hirers," but with the same liabilities; 5th, that the new keeper give "Attendance at the Library at a fixed time once a Week for two hours in Order to Let out and Receive the Books"; receive for himself the "Proffitts"; keep the books in repair; and replace lost copies,—all "at his Own Expence without any Charge to the Corporation."

The last consideration expresses aptly the attitude consistently shown by the city fathers toward this potentially valuable asset in their possession. Beyond initial charges of preparing accommodations, and the keeper's wages for a few years, not a shilling appears to have been disbursed toward its maintenance, let alone any attempt at improvement or increase. The application of Mr. Parker was received with favor, as it involved the Corporation in no expenditure and at the same time relieved it of all responsibility. Apparently with little question or discussion, therefore, the Common Council, Mayor Stephen Bayard presiding, agreed to the "Proposals" and tersely ordered that "the Key of the Library be Delivered to the Said James Parker."<sup>1</sup>

As in the case of many another promised work, however, to undertake is one thing and to consummate, another. Over a year passed before the catalogue was advertised. Mr. Parker, besides his public printing, conducted *The New-York Weekly Post-Boy*, established in 1743 as the third city newspaper. The first evidence of his new activity appears in the issue of August 19, 1745, in a notice calling for the return of some ten folio works, naming their titles,<sup>2</sup> "as likewise several others,"

<sup>1</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, V, 143.

<sup>2</sup> "Howel's History of the World, The 2d Vol. of Clarendon's History,

Hammond's Paraphrase, Newman's Concordance, Wood's Institutes, Cook's Institutes, Hardress's Re-

all of which would be "thankfully received, and no Questions ask'd." One of the books, it is interesting to observe, chanced to be "The 2d Vol. of Clarendon's History," which would almost make one think it the identical copy now in the Society Library, were it not for the fact that the latter had already been reposing thirty-three years in the Trinity Parish Library, while the Millington books are stated to have borne the S. P. G. bookplate, besides their former owner's name. The titles given in this instance, as also those of a quarto list similarly printed in October,<sup>1</sup> show that Dr. Millington's library had not been as closely confined to dull doctrinal works as the Bray and Sharpe collections. And yet Smith the historian wrote of the Corporation's books in 1756: "The greatest Part of them are upon theological Subjects." At the same time he gives their number as "a 1000 Volumes," adding: "through the Carelessness of the Keepers many are missing."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, on June 16, 1746, Mr. Parker, having "been at the Charge and Trouble of taking and printing a Catalogue of those Books," advertised free copies "to any Lovers of Reading, that will send and desire the same," thus making the Millington and Sharpe books again available to the public. His "Conditions of Loan" embraced "*Four Pence Half-penny* per Week, for every Book" borrowed, with "Security to return such Book safe and unhurt, at the End of one, two, three or four Weeks." Only one book could be taken at a time, "unless more than one Volume of a Sort." After June

ports, Dalton's Country Justice, Harris's Lexicon, and Whitby's Additions."

<sup>1</sup>"Two Volumes of an Historical and Geographical Dictionary, Tyson's Anatomy of a Pigmie, and

Dryden's Juvenal; as also several others in Octavo and Duodecimo." *The Post-Boy*, Oct. 14, 1745.

<sup>2</sup>William Smith. *History of New-York*. London, 1757. Pp. 194-195.



24th "due Attendance" was announced to be given "at said Library Room, every Tuesday at 4 o'Clock in the Afternoon."

In January, 1747, the same journal, its name slightly altered to *The New-York Gazette, Revived in the Weekly Post-Boy*,—for old William Bradford had then retired,—thus presented the possibilities of the Library as a winter attraction:

As several Persons have signified their Desire of hiring Books from the Library belonging to the Corporation of this City; but the Time of Attendance being short, and the cold Weather rendering it uncomfortable, they neglect it; this is to give Notice, that on any Person's signifying a Day before-hand what Book they would have, they may at any Time have such Book of the Printer hereof, they giving the usual Security for the same. Catalogues to be had for sending for.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding this very earnest endeavor to renew interest in the palsied Corporation Library, it seems to have listlessly settled once more into inanition. Again it cannot be told when Captain Parker<sup>2</sup>—brave enough in the face of human foes—was forced to yield to the deadly bayonet of atrophy, due both to the staleness of the unimproved collection and to the still prevalent literary indifference.

This next period of prostration, however, came sooner to an end, with the founding, in 1754, of the New York Society Library, whose history the present work has been undertaken to set forth. The conditions that led to its establishment and the circumstances of its origin will therefore fittingly appear later on. But it is proper to

<sup>1</sup> No copy is known to exist.

<sup>2</sup> For further particulars concerning James Parker see Charles R.

Hildeburn. *Sketches of Printers and Printing in Colonial New York*. New York, 1895. P. 34 et seq.



give here the terms under which the two institutions joined forces. Their resulting unique association for so many years, coupled with the fact that the light of each was extinguished in the storm of the Revolution, has very naturally developed belief that the Society Library was the successor to the older Corporation Library. In a sense it was, but not to the extent of the latter's identity being wholly merged into that of the Society Library, as will now appear.

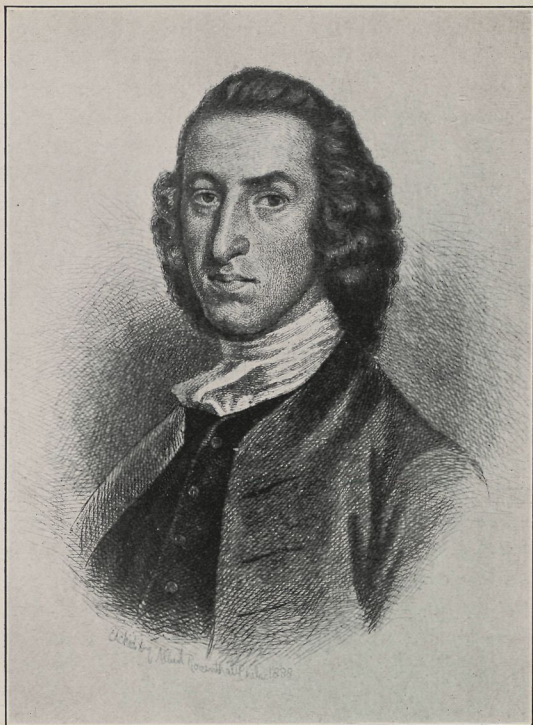
On September 11, 1754, at a meeting of the first board of Trustees of the new institution, a set of "Proposals" was drafted, whose preamble and resolutions read as follows: "*Whereas* the Corporation-Library hath for some years past been shut up, & the Books contained in it become of little or no advantage to the Public; that the same may hereafter be improved & found beneficial to the Community, *Resolved*," 1st, that the room in the City Hall containing that neglected collection "be appropriated to the Trustees of this Library for the use of the same"; 2d, that such of the former's books deemed "most fit . . . be joined to the same," the Society Library to be "accountable to the Corporation for the same whenever demanded"; 3d, that books judged "of no Service & scarce ever read" be "put up into Boxes to be made for that purpose and secured," to make room for the fresh consignment expected from abroad; 4th, that the Common Council appoint a person to act with a Trustee in taking an inventory of the old store; and 5th, that books of the Corporation Library entrusted to the Society Library "be improved for the public advantage in like manner" as the latter's, "subject in all respects to the same Rules and Regulations."

These proposals were ordered submitted to the city

authorities by a committee comprising the Hon. John Watts, William Livingston and William Peartree Smith. Unfortunately we are denied the satisfaction of knowing just how the response was phrased, for there is a gap of more than two months in the Common Council minutes at this very interesting juncture. Nor is there any allusion in the Society Library records to such reply; but, inasmuch as Mayor Holland and other members of the Corporation had subscribed to the new project, their consent was no doubt assured in advance. Reliable evidence of a favorable action, however, is found in *The New-York Mercury* for October 21st, wherein "the Proprietors of the New-York Society Library" are notified that its lately imported books had been "placed, for the present, by Leave of the Corporation, in their Library Room in the City-Hall," and that "constant Attendance" would be given "on Tuesdays and Fridays, from the hours of Ten to Twelve." Attached to this notice is a schedule of "The Terms for the Loan of Books," but, as they were established by the Trustees of the Society Library, their consideration will properly be deferred.<sup>1</sup>

While the new Subscription Library is winning applause and support, nothing is heard of the little old collection for some nine years. But that absorption had not taken place, and that the Common Council was bent on maintaining differentiation between the two institutions, is apparent from several entries in the city records. For instance in August, 1763, a warrant was issued to pay Isaac Stoutenburgh, a public overseer, for "the removing of the Citys arms, Library &c from the City Hall."<sup>2</sup> Also the same official was paid regularly for

<sup>1</sup> See p. 156.<sup>2</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, VI, 334.



Governor William Livingston, LL.D.  
Organizer, 1754. Trustee, 1754-1756; 1757-1773





his "Storage of the Citys arms Publick Library &c,"<sup>1</sup> while the City Hall was undergoing repairs. The work proceeded slowly, for not until May, 1765, was the old "Library Room" ordered to be finished "in the most plain and Cheap manner that Can be."<sup>2</sup>

At last, by August, 1765, the books would seem to have been restored to the shelves, for on the 23d the Common Council voted, "upon application of Alderman Hicks," then a Trustee of the Society Library, "that Thomas Jackson be appointed . . . to take Charge of the Corporation Library, and that he attend at the Library Room in the City Hall on Mondays and Thursdays, from half after Eleven oClock in the morning until one, to let out the Books and that he keep an exact account of the Income thereof."<sup>3</sup> He was also requested to have a new catalogue prepared and printed, while a stipend of £4 (\$10) a year was accorded him "for his Trouble." At the same time the rate of loans was appointed to be two shillings a month for a folio, one shilling for a quarto, and sixpence for an octavo "or Lesser Volume." Overdue books entailed a fine of six, four, or two pence a day, according to size.

Continuance of a close relationship between the two institutions is made very plain in this advertisement in the *New-York Gazette; or the Weekly Post-Boy*,<sup>4</sup> for five numbers, beginning September 19, 1765:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 376, 450.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 427. A neatly written copy of this minute, signed by City Clerk

Augustus Van Cortlandt, is preserved in the Society Library.

<sup>4</sup> Then printed by John Holt, "late partner with James Parker."

## NEW-YORK LIBRARY.

THIS is to give notice, that the worshipful corporation of the city of New-York, have committed the care of their Library, of near 2000 volumes, (among which are a great many very valuable, antient, curious, and rare books,) to Mr. Jackson, Master of the Academy in the Exchange, who will soon publish a catalogue,<sup>1</sup> with the conditions of lending them out. The trustees of the Society-Library have also appointed him keeper of their Library, consisting of a large well chosen collection of the most useful modern books, with a considerable late addition, of which a catalogue will be speedily published, that the subscribers may stitch in with their former catalogues. A share in this Library is now worth 10 l. 10 s. and is transferable by the subscribers.

Both Libraries are kept in a large commodious room, fitted up for the purpose, at the City-Hall, where constant attendance will be given on Mondays and Thursdays, from half past eleven to one o'clock.

As a sense of the universal benefit of good reading, and of the great want of opportunity of having that otherwise supplied, in this place, has prompted the corporation, and the gentlemen of the Society, to take this method for encouraging it; it is hoped great numbers will improve this advantage, which it is not doubted, Mr. Jackson will exert himself all he can to promote, at the fixed hours of attendance; and also will assist, particularly young gentlemen, at such other convenient hours, as upon application to him, they and he shall agree upon.

The announcement concludes with a request for the return of books borrowed from both Libraries, and with a quotation from Cicero on "Good Reading."

This renewed attempt to arouse interest in books was made coincidentally with the Stamp Act agitation, which was no tame affair in New York. During the

<sup>1</sup> No copy is known to be extant.

stirring decade that ensued, the people evidently were moved to read as well as to make history, for in December, 1771, there suddenly sprang into being another Subscription Library, denominated the Union Library Society. Though its brief career is recounted in a later section, it is pertinent to say here that the Common Council granted the new applicants leave to place their collection in "the Eastermost part of the Room" containing the books of the New York Society Library.<sup>1</sup>

This was in April, 1774. There were now three distinct collections of books in the old Library Room in the City Hall. Still a fourth was added in May, 1776, when the Library of King's College was deposited there on that institution's being turned into a military hospital by the "Rebels." Thus indeed may the city's whole hope of letters be likened to the marketer with all his eggs in one basket; and, alas, the simile continues to the disastrous crash, with but a small portion rescued from the sorry downfall.

The sad story as told by eye-witnesses has often been repeated in print. Of the old Corporation Library, the venerable dean of that little assemblage of books, the "Digest" of the S. P. G. records says: "Sufficient security for peaceful times, it availed not during the Revolutionary War."<sup>2</sup> And in the manuscript journal of the Society appears this abstract of a letter from the Rev. Dr. Charles Inglis, rector of Trinity Church, dated at New York, May 1, 1778:<sup>3</sup>

A library left to the Society in trust by the Rev<sup>d</sup> Dr. Millington in the year 1728, for the use of their Missionaries, and the li-

<sup>1</sup> *Common Council Minutes*, VIII, 24-25.

*of the S. P. G., 1701-1892.* London, 1893. P. 798.

<sup>2</sup> *Classified Digest of the Records*

<sup>3</sup> This letter cannot be found among the S. P. G. papers.



brary and philosophical apparatus belonging to the College, together with a large Subscription Library, belonging to the Inhabitants, were, after the King's Troops took possession of the City, plundered, sold, and dispersed by our soldiers, before a discovery was made. As soon as the affair came to D<sup>r</sup> Inglis's knowle[d]ge, he applied for redress, a proclamation was issued for returning the books, but not a tenth part of them, and those the least valuable, and the sets broken, were returned. He hath collected into one place, and sorted those that belonged to the several Libraries, and with the consent of the Mayor of the City, hath taken the Millington Library into his own possession. Their amount is about 80 volumes out of 1000; and the most valuable of these are a few that he had borrowed before the troubles, and had preserved with his own books. He begs to know the Society's determination respecting these books—whether they shall be left in their former state, or remain in his possession, or be given to Trinity Church, the Library of which was consumed by the Fire in Sept<sup>r</sup> 1776.

The committee on this communication was "*Agreed* in opinion that . . . the remains of the Millington Library be left in the custody of D<sup>r</sup> Inglis"; whereupon the Society "*Resolved* to agree with the Committee."

Nothing further can be stated positively concerning the little remnant of the collection. When the success of the American cause became certain, Dr. Inglis set sail for Nova Scotia, of which British province he was not long afterward consecrated first Anglican bishop. His private library, which may still have included these surviving volumes, was left to his son John, third bishop of the same diocese. At the latter's death his books were scattered, most of them being taken to England and there sold. Some were given to King's College at Windsor, Nova Scotia, but its librarian has found no books with the name of Dr. Millington inscribed therein. So, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, may



we not fancy a book or two of the long-defunct Corporation Library back again in England, perchance within sound once more of the old vesper bell, given to his beloved church at Stoke Newington by its pious rector, Dr. John Millington.

#### 4. *The New York Society Library, founded in 1754*

INASMUCH as succeeding chapters are devoted to setting forth the history of the Society Library, it is unnecessary to give attention to this institution here, further than to indicate its proper place in the chronological series. It is well to state, however, that the Society Library differed radically in its foundation from previous Library movements in New York. It owed existence to no gift of individual, or of associate body, but was the spontaneous outgrowth of a rather general desire for improvement. It was a Subscription Library, public in the sense that any person was welcome to membership at a uniform rate, and its books soon circulated through a fair proportion of the cultivated citizens.

From what has gone before, the claim cannot be substantiated that the Society Library, in its stewardship of the old Corporation Library, actually dates from 1730,—thus holding the distinction of being the oldest<sup>1</sup> Public Library in the country,—or still less truthfully from 1713, when the Sharpe books, now in its possession, were given to found a “Publick” Library. Only by way of analogy, in consequence of its close association with these older collections, may the Society Li-

<sup>1</sup> The term “oldest” is not used at all in the sense of *earliest*.

brary—in the sense in which the Father of Waters, in conjunction with its tributary, the Missouri, is the longest river in the world—be termed the oldest Public Library in the United States.

### 5. *The Library of King's College, 1757–1776*<sup>1</sup>

As elsewhere noted, the founders of the Society Library in 1754 had advanced as a motive for its establishment the hope that a Public Library “may be also advantageous to our intended College.”<sup>2</sup> This not over-confident expectation was probably justified, for not until 1760 was King's College housed in a building of its own. Its little faculty, therefore, as also its scarcely larger body of students, no doubt made glad use of the steadily growing public collection in the City Hall.

Naturally, however, the need of a special reference Library was early felt by the College authorities. But there were no funds to warrant expenditure for books, so it was by gift or bequest alone that a beginning must be made. Nor had their patience long to wait. Like the old Corporation Library, its origin was due to a legacy. By the will of the Hon. Joseph Murray, one of its Governors, as also a member of the first board of Trustees of the Society Library, who died in April, 1757, there was devised to “the Governors of the College of

<sup>1</sup> Sketches of this early collection have appeared in print in the several histories of Columbia College, the latest being in an article on “The Library” by Librarian James H. Canfield, LL.D., in *A History of Columbia University, 1754–1904*.

New York, 1904. P. 427 *et seq.* Material in the present study is based, however, on original sources, some of which have been unavailable hitherto.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 136, 146.

the Province of New York, by whatever name they are called," the residue of his estate, including a fine library.<sup>1</sup> The books were doubtless handed over with despatch, to judge from a notice inserted in the *Mercury* for May 16th, calling for the immediate return of any books borrowed from the testator or his "late lady."



*Joseph Murray Esq<sup>r</sup>*  
of the Middle Temple

Local journals eulogized this early benefactor of the College in highest terms. The *Gazette* of May 2d recounted how, "during the long and extensive Course of his Practice," Mr. Murray had "approved himself a Gentleman of the strictest Integrity, Fidelity, and

<sup>1</sup> Abstract of the will of the Hon. Joseph Murray, Esq. (*Liber* 20, p. 233, of "Wills in the New York Surrogate's Office"), printed in *The*

*Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1896.* New York, 1897. Pp. 165-166.



Honour," and that "by Principle, he was a steady and hearty Friend to the National Constitution, both of Church and State, and frequent in his Attendance on the publick Offices and Ordinances of Religion." The *Mercury* of the same date said of him:

On Thursday last departed this Life, in the 63d Year of his Age, the Honourable JOSEPH MURRAY, Esq; one of his Majesty's Council for the Province of New-York, and the most considerable Lawyer here in his Time; by which Profession he acquired a large Fortune, in such a Manner as justly intituled him to the Character of an honest, upright, judicious Man: As a Counsellor, he gave his Opinion and Advice according to the Dictates of his own Reason, without Favour or Affection; it was the Cause and not the Person that directed his Judgment; and neither Threats [n]or Frowns could make him deviate from what he thought right: His Purse was always open to the true Objects of Charity: He was an excellent Husband, a kind Master, and a true Friend; a most regular Man in all his Conduct; and those Lines in the XVth Psalm, might justly be applied to him. . . .

It seems probable that this beginning of the College Library was deposited temporarily in the Trinity charity school building, for, according to advertisements in the newspapers, President Johnson gave regular instruction to his classes "at the Vestry Room in the School-House, near the English Church."<sup>1</sup> As an assistant minister of Old Trinity, Dr. Johnson was also entitled to unrestricted use of the Parish Library, so that in a sense all the literary resources of the city—such as they were—had been placed at the disposal of the young College.

The next acquisition was likewise a bequest, in most

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Gazette; or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, July 1, 1754.



respects a counterpart of the Millington foundation of the Corporation Library. According to printed records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, for the year ending in February, 1759, it appears that

the Rev. Dr. *Bristowe*, a worthy Member of the Society lately deceased, having by his last Will, bequeathed his Library of near 1500 Volumes to the Society *to be sent to the College of New York, of which Dr. Johnson is President, or to such other Place or Places as the Society should direct*, the Society hath directed those Books to be sent and placed in this College of *New York*, in Approbation of the generous Donor's Design.<sup>1</sup>

*D Bristowe*

The Rev. Duncombe Bristowe, D.D., a graduate of Brasenose College, Oxford, had been, at the time of his death in June, 1758, rector of All Hallows, Staining within Aldgate, London, for thirty years. The recipient of various university honors, he also held a supplementary "college living" at Selborne in Hampshire. Public announcement of this bequest—"together with *Sixty Pounds* sterling, to be paid after his Widow's decease"—was made at New York in Weyman's *Gazette* for June 25, 1759.

For some time, however, it looked as if a notice of the benefaction was all the College would receive. In a letter dated February 16, 1760, the Rev. Henry Barclay, second rector of Trinity Church, in behalf of the Governors thanked the Venerable Society "for their resolution to send us the Library, bequeathed by the late worthy Dr Bristow."<sup>2</sup> He says further: "The Library

<sup>1</sup> *An Abstract of the Proceedings of the Society.* London, 1759. P. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. II B (1759-1782), pt. i, no. 44.

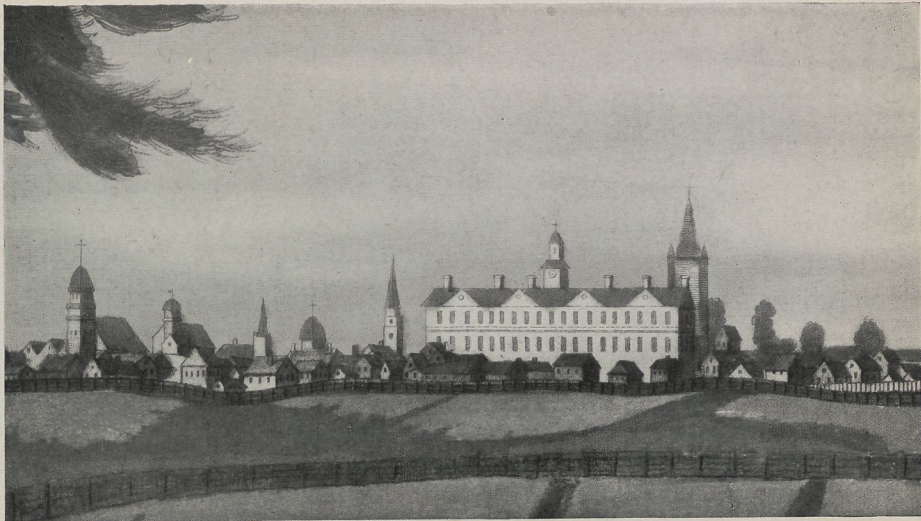
Room in the College we hope will be in readiness to receive the Books by Midsummer." These hopes were no doubt realized, so far as the Murray books were concerned, for by May the officers and students "began to Lodge & Diet" in the new building, so long the home of the College on Murray street. The attractiveness of the spot chosen, then lying well without the settled part of town, in full view of the Hudson, is attested to by an English visitor, who predicts it "will be the most beautifully situated of any college in the world."<sup>1</sup>

The promised collection had not arrived at the time of the annual meeting of the Governors in May, 1761. Instead, President Johnson read to the board a letter "from the Rev<sup>d</sup> Doctor Bearcroft in which he desires some directions about the Librery of Books given to this Corporation by the late Rev<sup>d</sup> Doctor Bristow." He was thereupon directed to ask Dr. Bearcroft "to deliver the said Librery to M<sup>r</sup> William Neat of London Merchant when he shall chuse to call for them." And Nathaniel Marston, an influential member, was requested to notify Mr. Neat "that as soon as there is a Peace he will call on Doctor Bearcroft for the said Librery and send it over in the best and most reasonable manner he can and to Insure it when shipt."

Owing to a continuance of war and for other reasons, the books had not come by March, 1763; though a committee on "the State and Circumstances of the College," comprising "M<sup>r</sup> Chief Justice Pratt, M<sup>r</sup> Justice Horsmanden, the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Barclay, Coll<sup>l</sup> De Lancey and the Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Auchmuty or any three of them," then re-

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Andrew Burnaby, D.D. *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America*. Reprinted in *A General Collection of*

*the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*. Edited by John Pinkerton. London, 1812. P. 737.



King's College in 1760

Home of the first College Library in New York, 1760–1776  
Present site, West Broadway, Murray Street and Park Place





ported "a considerable Number of Books in the College Library (the generous Donation of the late Joseph Murray Esq<sup>r</sup>.) and a very large Addition soon expected from England, the Donation of Doctor Bristow." It was thereupon deemed "high time, that a Librarian be appointed with a small Salary, and that he be furnished with such Rules and Directions as may tend to the preservation of the Books committed to his Care, and best answer the purposes for which they were bestowed." Accordingly Robert Harpur, "the Mathematical Teacher," became first incumbent of that office at £10 (\$25) a year. He was further ordered to "make a Catalogue of the Books that now are and hereafter may belong to the Library and deliver a Copy thereof to the President of the College and another Copy to the Clerk of this Corporation, and also that he be accountable for the said Books."

Meanwhile, in November, 1762, the Governors had authorized "James Jay M.D. a gentleman of this City Eminent in his Profession, the Honourable George Clarke Esq<sup>r</sup> Secretary and Robert Charles Esq<sup>r</sup> Agent of this Province and Barlow Trecothick & Moses Franks Merch<sup>ts</sup> of London and each of them by himself our Substitutes, for us and in our behalf to Solicit and receive the Donations and Contributions of all such as shall be Generously disposed to favour the advancement of Learning & Virtue in this extensive & uncultivated part of the World."

In the course of the address presented by this commission to the English authorities of church and state, as to the universities, mention of the Library is made in outlining the progress of the institution, as follows: "Thus far encouraged a neat & convenient Edifice is erected,

for public Schools & Lodgings, a small Library, with a Mathematical Apparatus provided, and a course of Education begun, under the Direction of a President & two Professors."

In response to this memorial, substantial sums of money were contributed to the College, and its Library received certain specific gifts, for the minutes record that "Sundry Gentlemen at Oxford gave Books whose names are in them." Indeed, President Nathaniel F. Moore enumerates in his historical sketch "many valuable works given by the Earl of Bute and other individuals, and from the University of Oxford, a copy of every work printed at the University Press."<sup>1</sup>

Very likely the commission was also instructed to hasten the shipment of the Bristowe books, for at the May meeting of 1763 Mr. Marston read a letter from the Messrs. Neat & Co., "acquainting him that they had Shipped nine Boxes of Books the Gift of the late Reverend Doctor Bristow to the College which the Governors have received." The arrival of this consignment is chronicled in dignified fashion in the following paragraph from Weyman's *Gazette* of May 16, 1763:

With Pleasure we can inform the Public, from good Authority, that the Governors of King's College, in this City, have received a Donation by the last Vessels from London, of no less than Twelve Hundred Volumes, of valuable, well chosen, and useful Books; being Part of the Library of the late eminent and worthy Divine, Doctor BRISTOWE: The Remainder of his Library, consisting of several Hundred Volumes more, is expected every Day. This generous and noble Present, must afford a singular Pleasure to every Gentleman of Learning

<sup>1</sup> For sources of this statement see (Oxford items), and for Sept. 24th Holt's *Journal*, for July 30, 1772 (London notes).



amongst us, and to all that have the Improvement and Well-being of the rising Generation at Heart: And which with the Library of the late Hon. Joseph Murray, Esq; (a Gift also to the College) are immediately to be placed in the College Library, for the Use of the Students, under proper Restrictions and Regulations. With such essential Helps to Learning, may we not flatter ourselves with the Prospect of soon seeing our Youth, hitherto destitute of a Seminary of Learning, vie with our Neighbours in the Knowledge and Improvement of the Liberal Arts and Sciences? The rising Generation will now enjoy a Blessing our Fore-fathers were destitute of, and reap those valuable Advantages which the generous Donors had in View, by bestowing their Libraries on an Infant College, that has been honoured and promoted by the Legislature, several publick spirited Gentlemen at home and abroad, and which, every Day, becomes more and more deserving the Countenance, Protection, and Assistance of every Person of Rank and Learning amongst us.

It presently appearing, however, that all the books had not been sent, after waiting over a year the board, in October, 1764, directed Mr. Marston "to write to M<sup>r</sup> Neate to enquire what is become of the Remainder of the Library left to the College by Doctor Bristow and to desire him to Ship them as soon as possible upon the best and most reasonable Terms he can."

No answer having apparently been elicited as the months wore away, again, in December, 1765, the second President, Dr. Myles Cooper, and the Rev. Samuel Auchmuty, third rector of Trinity Church, were "desired to write to Doctor Burton the Society's Secretary to enquire what is become of the Remainder of Doctor Bristow's Library given to this Corporation and that he be requested to put them into the Hands of M<sup>r</sup> William Neate in order to be sent over as soon as conveniently may be." The resulting letter, at once despatched by

these gentlemen, and now preserved in the archives of the S. P. G., states that 1000 volumes had been received of "M<sup>r</sup>. Neat Merch<sup>t</sup> in London," and requests Dr. Burton, if the remaining books "are still in the Custody of the Society," to "be pleased to order them to Mess<sup>rs</sup>. Neat & Pecue Merch<sup>ts</sup>, who are desired to forward them by the first good Opportunity."



*Duncombe Bristowe, D.D.*

This communication evoked at least a reply, which in November, 1766, President Cooper writes he "had not the pleasure to receive before the latter end of August, it having been landed at some distant port." With reference to the missing books he says:

I likewise am much obliged to you, as is the whole Government of the College, for the notice you take of D<sup>r</sup>. Auchmuty's Letter and mine, concerning the Library of D<sup>r</sup>. Bristowe: tho' we are sorry to find so small a prospect of recovering such a consider-

able number of Books as were left in England when the former part was sent us. But perhaps, Sir, it may be of some Use to us, that you should be informed that y<sup>e</sup> principal remainder of the Books was said to be in the possession of D<sup>r</sup> Bearcroft's Son, who was then out of London; which was given as y<sup>e</sup> Reason why the whole could not be sent us at once. Wherefore [if] it would be in your power, and not attended with too much farther trouble, we should beg of you to make Enquiry of him; and I am persuaded y<sup>e</sup> Application would not be ineffectual.<sup>1</sup>

From still a third letter, similar in purport, it is clear that the long-sought volumes never materialized, for in September, 1767, Dr. Cooper again thanked the secretary "for the Trouble you have been at, in a fruitless Enquiry after the Remainder of D<sup>r</sup> Bristowe's Library."<sup>2</sup>

Besides these important gifts, the College authorities had enlarged the Library by incidental purchases of books from local dealers, Hugh Gaine, Garrat Noel and William Weyman, the first and last of whom were also printers and newspaper editors. Mr. Noel on one occasion prior to 1763 presented "Romain's Ed. of M. Calasio's Hebr. Concordance 4. vol. fol." Another donor named in the Governors' minutes is Bartholomew Crannell, a former city marshal and for a long time overseer of the local watch, who in March, 1770, bestowed "sundry Books to be added to the College Library."

From the occupations of its two chief benefactors, the collection partook largely of a professional character, comprising standard works in law and theology, with the usual proportion of history and the classics, and a sprinkling of science and belles-lettres. Its exact extent there is no means of ascertaining, for no "catalogue" has survived. It may reasonably be estimated at about two

<sup>1</sup> *S. P. G. Letter Book*, vol. III B, pt. ii, no. 319.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 320.



thousand volumes at least, when the perfidious dispersion took place. The known facts are as follows:

In April-May, 1776, in accord with a demand "from a Number of Men who stiled themselves the *Committee of Safety*,"<sup>1</sup> the College building was given up to the use of the patriot troops, all academic exercises were suspended, and the books and apparatus removed to the City Hall. There they were probably deposited in the old Library Room, then sheltering the Corporation Library (presumably including the Sharpe Collection), the Society Library and the Union Library Society. A few months later came the cataclysm, when all alike suffered disruption and other indignities.

Two eye-witnesses of this vandalism have left on record what they beheld. John Pintard affirms that the British soldiers were in the habit of carrying off the books in their knapsacks and bartering them for grog. Judge Thomas Jones, though of strongly loyal sympathies, thus unsparingly draws aside the curtain on the shameful scene:

✓ Upon General Howe's entry into New York in September, 1776, the soldiers broke open the City Hall, and plundered it of the College Library, its Mathematical and Philosophical apparatus and a number of valuable pictures which had been removed there by way of safety when the rebels converted the College into a hospital. . . . I saw in a public house upon Long Island nearly 40 books bound and lettered, in which were affixed the arms of Joseph Murray, Esq., under pawn from one dram to three drams each. . . . All this was done with impunity, publicly, and openly. No punishment was ever inflicted upon the plunderers. No attempts were made by the British Commanders to obtain restitution of the stolen goods, nor did they ever discounte-

<sup>1</sup> From "The Matricula" of King's College.

nance such unjustifiable proceedings, by issuing orders condemning such unmilitary conduct, and forbidding it in future.<sup>1</sup>

Though our author here denounces his own side, and in no gentle terms, he is yet in error with regard to his last charge, as will presently appear. Writing as he did in England, upwards of ten years after the perpetration of these outrages, memory may well have played him false, the Attainder Act of 1782 preventing him from verifying recollection or securing correct information. As a matter of fact no fewer than four proclamations were issued by his Majesty's military representatives, their language testifying unmistakably to a high regard for law and order. The first of these was published in *Gainé's Gazette and Weekly Mercury* for February 3, 1777, as follows:

### PROCLAMATION.

INFORMATION having been made to Major-General ROBERTSON, that the Library of King's College, and of the Society Library in the City of New-York, have been pillaged, as well of the Books as of Part of the Philosophical Apparatus. PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that in the Books belonging to the College is placed either the Arms of the College, or of the Society for propagating the Gospel, and in some of them the Arms of Joseph Murray, Esq; and that in the Books of the City Society Library, is placed the Arms of the said Society, or that the several Books so pillaged are otherwise so marked, that no one can be ignorant to whom they respectively belong. And all Persons in whose Hands any of the said Books or Apparatus now are, by whatever means they came into their Possession, are hereby strictly ordered, within TEN DAYS, to deliver the same to the Printer hereof, for the Use of the respective Pro-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jones. *History of New York during the Revolutionary War*. Edited by Edward F. deLancey. New York, 1879. I, 136.

prietors, or they will be committed to the Provost,<sup>1</sup> and punished as Receivers of stolen Goods.

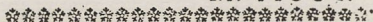
*New-York, 27th January, 1777.* JAMES ROBERTSON.

P R O C L A M A T I O N.

**I**NFORMATION having been made to Major General PIGOT, that the Library of King's College, and the Society Library in the City of New-York, have been pillaged, as well of the Books as of Part of the Philosophical Apparatus, of the natural and anatomical Curiohties, &c. PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given, That in the Books belonging to the College, is placed either the Arms of the College, or of the Society for propagating the Gospel; and that in the Books of the City Society Library, is placed the Arms of the said Society; or that the several Books so pillaged, are otherwise so marked that no one can be ignorant to whom they respectively belong. And all Persons in whose Hands any of the said Books or Apparatus, &c. now are, by whatever Means they came into their Possession, are hereby strictly ordered within *One Month*, to deliver the same to the Reverend Mr. Houseal, Minister of the ancient Lutheran Trinity-Church, living in Little Queen-Street, at No. 10; of this City, for the Use of the respective Proprietors; or they will be committed to the Provost, and punished as Receivers of stolen Goods.

NEW-YORK, 26th March, 1777.

Rt. PIGOT.



Proclamation (facsimile size) by British commander for return of King's College and Society Library books, plundered from City Hall. From Hugh Gainé's *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury*, March 31, 1777. See pp. 95-97, 194-195.

A similar notice, signed by Major-General Pigot, appeared in the same newspaper for March 31st, when the

<sup>1</sup>The old debtors' prison, used by the British to incarcerate "rebels." Standing a little to the south-east of

the present City Hall, it was long known as the Hall of Records until taken down in 1902-1903.



period in which missing books must be returned was extended to "*One Month.*"<sup>1</sup> Their recipient this time was to be "the Reverend Mr. Houseal, Minister of the ancient Lutheran Trinity-Church, living in Little Queen-Street, at No. 10, of this City."<sup>2</sup>

Just how many volumes were restored in response to these commands, there is no knowing. An earlier request for their return had been inserted in the *Gazette and Mercury* for several weeks in October and November, 1776, by Samuel Clossy, M.D., who held the professorship in anatomy, as follows:

**I**F any person into whose hands part of the College apparatus or books, which were deposited in the City-Hall in May last, or any of Dr. Clossy's books, which were deposited in the closet near the organ loft in St. Paul's, will bring them to the doctor, at the house where Dr. Bard lately lived, the favour will be very gratefully acknowledged; and whatever trouble or expence such person may have been at in carrying such instruments or books, the doctor will very gratefully pay them for.

The allusion in this notice to a deposit of books in Old St. Paul's at once suggests the extract already quoted from President Moore on page 36, that "of the books recovered, six or seven hundred volumes were so, only after about thirty years, when they were found, with as many belonging to the N. Y. Society Library, and some

<sup>1</sup> These proclamations were also printed in German in the same columns, entitled "Eine Öffentliche Bekanntmachung," and signed "Von Heister," the Hessian commander.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Bern(h)ard Michael Houseal, D.V.M., was pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, corner of Broadway and Rector street, from 1770 to 1783. A man of imposing personality, culture and eloquence,

he was a Governor of King's College and of the New York Hospital. An ardent loyalist, he left for Nova Scotia when the British evacuated the city in November, 1783. D. Johann Ludewig Schulze. *Nachrichten von den vereinigten Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinen in Nord-America, 1787.* Allentown, Pa., 1886. P. 634 *et seq.*

belonging to Trinity Church, in a room in St. Paul's Chapel, where, it seemed, no one but the Sexton had been aware of their existence, and neither he nor any body else could tell how they had arrived there."

Whether the miscellaneous assortment was actually protected all those years by a stoned-up doorway,<sup>1</sup> there is a reasonable doubt, partially confirmed by a contemporary statement in print that the books "were not forgotten, as reported, but have been visited frequently by Bishop Provoost and others."<sup>2</sup> So interesting is the announcement that finally focused attention on the long-neglected tomes, that it should be seen in full as it caught the eye of readers of the *Morning Chronicle* on December 13, 1802:

COMMUNICATION.—A report prevailed a day or two past of a *splendid library* having been found in a part of the chancel of St. Paul's church by the workmen employed in preparing a place for the organ. It was supposed to have originally belonged to Columbia College, and to have been locked up and *forgotten* ever since the revolution. On investigating the matter, however, it was found to be merely a *hoax*, invented by some wag to *quiz the natives a few*. The report had gained so much by travelling that it was said a librarian was discovered with the library, who, on coming out into the city, was quite surprised with the changes that had taken place!!<sup>3</sup>

Although this quasi-resurrection was labeled "a hoax" by the witty contributor, and despite editorial explanation next day that the "two thousand volumes" in question were "the remains of a library presented by

<sup>1</sup> See page 36.

<sup>2</sup> The *Morning Chronicle*, N. Y., Dec. 14, 1802.

<sup>3</sup> Apropos of this last witticism, the *Morning Chronicle* remarked

editorially next day: "The part of the report concerning a librarian's having been discovered with them, though *probable enough*, is a *mis-take*."

different persons to Trinity Church, many years since"; nevertheless, that among them were certainly some survivors of the old King's College collection is proven, not merely by President N. F. Moore's later assertion, but according to minutes of the Trustees of Columbia College. On August 1, 1803, President Benjamin Moore "presented a Letter from Valentine Nutter<sup>1</sup> respecting the Books lately found in St Paul's Church; which, being read, was committed to the Treasurer to consider & report."

No further reference to the subject is found in the Trustees' records, the long-missing volumes doubtless being returned with little parade to their former repository, whose name had in the meantime been changed to Columbia College. And to-day the great Library of Columbia University cherishes among its treasures a handful of books known to have formed a portion of the King's College collection. A few of them still bear the elegant "arms" of the Hon. Joseph Murray, Esq., "of the Middle Temple," while others are adorned with the bookplate of the Rev. Dr. Duncombe Bristowe, as also with the ancient emblem of the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A large landholder in upper Manhattan, for years a warden of St. Michael's parish. Before and during the Revolution there had been a prominent "bookbinder" of that name in the city, "opposite the Coffee-House" in Broad street.

<sup>2</sup> There is in the Library of the General Theological Seminary a single folio volume, once a part of this collection, *A Rational Account of the Grounds of Protestant Religion* . . . By the Rev. Edward Stillingfleet, D.D. London, 1681. It is in excellent condition and con-

tains perfect copies of both S. P. G. and Bristowe bookplates. Cf. p. 37. On the fly-leaf of a survivor of the collection (now in the Columbia Library), a copy of Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (Boston, 1764), is written: "The Gift of The Rev'd Mr Jeremy Condry, of Boston, to the Library of King's College in New York. Novr 1766." This gentleman, "well esteemed among his associates" (*Memorial History of Boston*), was pastor of the First Baptist Church, 1739-1768.



To the man of sentiment these antiquated and now unread books are very appealing, not alone as representing the earliest College Library in the province of



New York, as also the noble aim of enlightened donors, but as being tangible, eloquent evidence of that old Library, which, in helping to mold the youthful minds of such men as Egbert Benson, Robert R. Livingston, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, has fairly earned the reverential regard of a nation.

6. *Booksellers' Circulating Libraries, 1763-1776*

As is only too well known, New York was lamentably behind its Puritan neighbors in an appreciation of the printed page. William Bradford, who introduced printing to the Knickerbockers in 1693,<sup>1</sup> would seem to have been also the first local dealer in books. In this line he had no competitors for over a generation, for, according to an English visitor in 1719, there was then "but one little Bookseller's Shop" in New York city, whereas the Boston Exchange was "surrounded with Booksellers' Shops, which have a good Trade." In fairness to the former, however, should be quoted his further comment that there was "in the Plantations of Virginia, Maryland, Carolina, Barbadoes, and the Islands, none at all."<sup>2</sup>

These statements are corroborated by Dr. Franklin, who has recorded that about the year 1725 "there was not a good bookseller's shop in any of the colonies to the southward of Boston." He observes wittily that the printers of New York and Philadelphia, in offering for sale "only paper, etc., almanacs, ballads, and a few common school-books," "were indeed stationers."<sup>3</sup>

Following Bradford in succession came John Peter Zenger, James Parker and Hugh Gainé, all noteworthy names in the history of metropolitan printing and journalism. From the character of their calling they nat-

<sup>1</sup> Printing was begun in Cambridge, Mass., in 1639, by Stephen Daye. Pennsylvania came second of the colonies, with Bradford's press at Philadelphia in 1685.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Neal, A.M. *The History*

*of New-England*. 2d edition, London, 1747. Vol. II, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin*. Edited by John Bigelow. New York, 1887. Vol. I, pp. 167-168.

urally were booksellers also. So far as has been ascertained, however, none of these individuals—nor contemporary lesser lights in the typographical firmament—appears to have essayed a Circulating Library, already a well-established English institution, one having been in operation in London as early as 1674.<sup>1</sup> The nearest approach to anything of the kind was, it will be recalled, James Parker's vain though brave attempt in 1745 to manage the Corporation Library with a view to personal profit.<sup>2</sup> The actual inauguration of this branch of commercial activity in New York was reserved for a bookseller who was never a printer at all,—Garraat Noel.

The pedigree and early years of this enterprising and useful citizen must be left for future research to tell. He was well in his prime when, in March, 1753, he was registered a freeman of the city under the appellation of "Schoolmaster."<sup>3</sup> Not finding this occupation sufficiently lucrative, however, in May of the same year he opened a bookstore in Dock, now Pearl, street, near Coenties market, "at the Sign of the Bible," where he advertised for sale, besides "Books, Stationary, &c.," "a fresh Parcel of the right Tooth Powder, and Stoughton's famous Bitters."

He prospered to such an extent that in August, 1763, he felt able to embark in a semi-commercial, semi-literary venture hitherto untried in New York, and which, strange to say, had not yet been undertaken in Boston.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Francis Kirkman, author and bookseller (b. 1632), combined with his regular business "that of a circulating library, his specialty being plays, poetry, and romances." (*Dict. Natl. Biog.*)

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 72-76.

<sup>3</sup> List of "Burghers and Freemen, 1675-1866." *N. Y. Historical Society Collections for 1885.* P. 177.

<sup>4</sup> See article by Charles K. Bolton, "Circulating Libraries in Boston, 1765-1865," in *Proceedings of the Colonial Society of Mass.*, Feb.,



The idea may have been suggested to him with force at that particular time by the temporary closing of the Corporation Library on account of repairs to the City Hall—a suspension which must have been shared in some measure by the Society Library. At all events, he took advantage of the situation and issued in the newspapers this announcement, here taken from Weyman's *The New-York Gazette* for August 29th:

To those who delight in Reading, And would spend their Leisure Hours, and Winter Evenings, with Profit and Entertainment, THIS IS TO GIVE NOTICE, that this Day is opened by GARRAT NOEL, Bookseller next Door to the Merchants Coffee-House, A CIRCULATING LIBRARY; Consisting of several Thousand Volumes of choice Books, in History, Divinity, Travels, Voyages, Novels, &c.

A Catalogue of the Books, with the Conditions of subscribing, may be seen at said Noel's Store.—Where are SOLD all Sorts of Books and Stationary Ware: And Country Stores, and Chapmen, are supplied, Wholesale and Retail, on the very lowest Terms.

Said NOEL has likewise to sell, the very best of Durham Flour of Mustard, and a fresh Parcel of very fine Snuff, commonly called Black Guard.

In the same journal for September 12th following, Mr. Noel proclaims a large addition to the Library, justifying his enterprise on the ground that "sundry Gentlemen" had "for a long Time been desirous of seeing such a Thing established in this City," and that

1908, pp. 196-207. And even a few months before Garrat Noel's venture, George Wood, bookbinder and stationer in Charleston, S. C., advertised his intent "to set on foot A CIRCULATING LIBRARY" for "Gentlemen and Ladies that approve this

plan." (*South Carolina Gazette*, March 5-12, 1763.) For mention of other Circulating Libraries in the colonies, see Charles Evans' monumental and invaluable *American Bibliography* (Chicago, 1903), vol. 4, p. x.

many persons had "given their Approbation by subscribing to the One now on Foot." The "Conditions for subscribing," he trusts, "will not, for the Present, be tho't unreasonable, as the Books are all new, the Number already very considerable, and will be constantly increasing, especially by all the new published Books, Pamphlets, Magazines, and Reviews, &c." The "Conditions" were as follows:

1. Each Subscriber to pay Five Dollars a Year, viz. Two Dollars on subscribing, and One Dollar at the Beginning of each Quarter afterwards.

2. No Subscriber to take above one Book at a Time out of the Library.


3. Any Subscriber losing or spoiling a Book, shall pay the full Price of it, or the Set, taking the Remainder.

NOTE,—Books will be delivered out of the Library any Time, except Sundays, and after Store is shut.

The institution seems to have maintained itself, though with little or no advertising, for Weyman's *Gazette* on October 8, 1764, announces it as "now opened for the second Year, with the Addition of several Hundred Volumes of choice Books." There is significance, however, in the statement that those "pleased to become Subscribers" might "read a whole Year at the easy Rate of *Four* Dollars"!

Noel's Library continued to exist until the fall of 1765, at least. In August of that year the Common Council, it will be remembered, again had a spasmodic realization of the latent value of its Public Library, and, on the restoration of the City Hall, appointed Thomas Jackson to take charge of the old Corporation Library in conjunction with his duties as Librarian of the

Society Library.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Noel was moved by this action to append a note to his regular advertisement in Holt's *The New-York Gazette; or the Weekly Post-Boy*, for September 5th and 12th, as follows:

 The Subscribers to NOEL's circulating Library are hereby informed, that there is an Addition made of several new Books, and more expected for their entertainment, and of those who shall think proper to become encouragers of this useful undertaking.

Again, on September 19th, in the very issue of this same paper that first proclaimed the anticipated renaissance of the "NEW-YORK LIBRARY,"<sup>2</sup> there was put forth a more elaborate address, containing the same terms of subscription as the year before, and a statement of catalogues "to be had gratis."<sup>3</sup> Here, after an array of titles of recent importations, comprehending "a vast Variety of all Sorts of Books," the public was informed of the continuance of the Circulating Library, "with a large Addition of choice BOOKS, particularly those that have been lately published."

This notice appeared in the next number of Holt's *Gazette* for the second and last time. Apparently Mr. Noel abandoned his project as profitless, especially in competition with a natural stir over the renovated collections in the City Hall, which represented more distinctly a public movement. So he devoted himself thereafter to heralding new or seasonable publications and to other details of his regular business. The follow-

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> No copies of his Circulating Library catalogues are known to be extant. They were probably printed by Gaine, who published catalogues

of Noel's stock-in-trade in 1755 and 1762. See *The Journals of Hugh Gaine, Printer*. Edited by Paul Leicester Ford. New York, 1902. Vol. I, pp. 94, 110.



ing week, for example, he advertised a work of current import in that exciting Stamp Act year, "Oppression, a Poem, by an American, with Notes by a North Briton. Occasioned by the Grievances of the Times." Besides books and "stationary," he sold cutlery, patent medicines and miscellaneous articles, including at one time "extraordinary good Violins and Flutes, with an Assortment of New Music,"<sup>1</sup> and again "a few extraordinary good Temple Spectacles, with Brazil Pebble Eyes, set in Steel and Silver, double Joints, in very neat Cases, from Three to Five Pounds per Pair."<sup>2</sup>

Without saying more of his "general Assortment of Books" than that it comprised standard English works of the day, the subjoined extract from a newspaper insertion will prove of interest, as showing the attention he paid to juvenile tastes:

And what should not be forgot, A very large Parcel of Mr. Newberry's beautiful gilt Picture Books, for the Entertainment of his old Friends the pretty Masters and Misses of New-York, at Christmas and New-Year;—Amongst them they will find, The History of Giles Gingerbread, Esq; The History of Goody Two Shoes. Nurse Trueloves Christmas Box and New Years Gift. The Easter, Whitsuntide, and Valentine Gifts. The Fairing or Golden Toy. The Little Lottery Book. Be Merry and Wise. Master Tommy Trapwits Jest. Poems for Children Six Feet high.—Royal Primmer, Royal Battledore, &c. &c. &c.<sup>3</sup>

After the lapse of fully three years, however, the project was revived "upon a very extensive Plan." So promises an advertisement in Mr. Noel's characteristic

<sup>1</sup> John Holt's *The New-York Journal, or General Advertiser*, Dec. 18, 1766.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, July 7, 1768.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 18, 1766.

style in Holt's *Journal* for September 1, 1768. It was to open on October 1st at the same place, when the "Terms" would be divulged to any "inclined to subscribe." The notice closes with a request that those having books "belonging to the former Circulating Library" should "return them forthwith, or it will be expected that they will pay for them, agreeable to the Articles."

So far as has been ascertained, this effort was fruitless and was the last attempt made by Mr. Noel to conduct a Circulating Library. For nearly a decade longer he continued business "in his usual Way," as a press notice phrased it. In April, 1771, he admitted to partnership Ebenezer Hazard, the firm, as "Noel and Hazard, Booksellers," for some years occupying his old station, "Next Door to the Coffee-House." In the spring of 1776 they were located "At the Post-Office," in Broad street.

Throughout his sojourn in New York, Garrat Noel had been very intimately identified with the historic First Presbyterian Church. Its old manuscript records plainly reveal not merely his membership and that of "Experience his Wife," but also his constant services, as a trustee for the years 1757 and 1758, and thereafter as an elder until his death. He also held the treasurership from November, 1767, to May, 1773, besides acting as "Stated Clerk of the Session" from the former date until January, 1774, when he resigned "by Reason of Infirmary."

Not long afterward he removed to Elizabethtown, New Jersey, where he died, September 22, 1776, in his seventieth year. His long-time fellow-citizen, Hugh Gaine, not content with saying that he was for "many

years an eminent bookseller, in the city of New-York," adds in evident sincerity: "He was a kind husband, and tender parent, and justly esteemed and beloved by all that knew him."<sup>1</sup> His love for books would seem to have come by inheritance to his grandson, Anthony Bleecker,—son of Mary Noel and Anthony Lispenard Bleecker,—a recognized man of letters of his day, and who for the last seventeen years of his life was an active member of the board of Trustees of the New York Society Library.

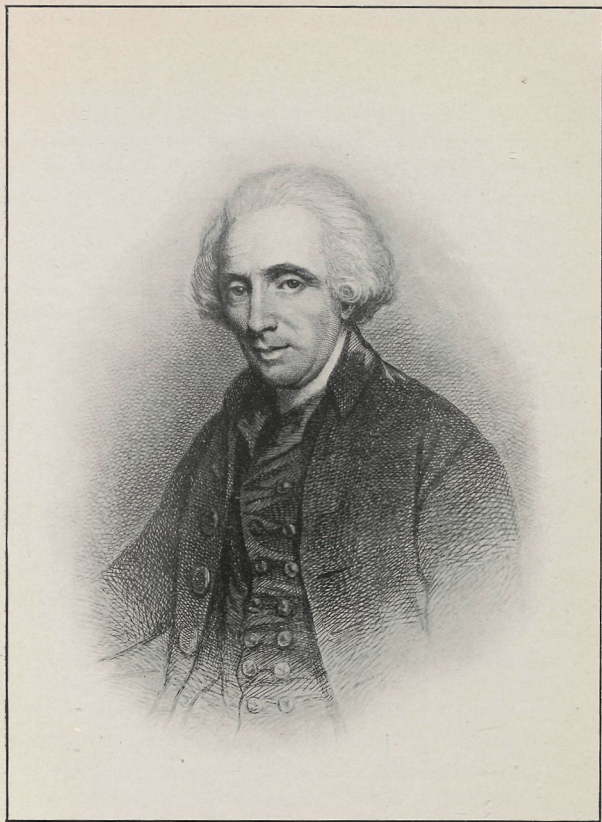
But before Garrat Noel left New York, another attempt was made to establish a Circulating Library there. More than five years elapsed, however, between the last-mentioned advertisement of Mr. Noel's enterprise and the initial announcement of his successor. At length there came to the front a person of the requisite daring, Samuel Loudon, a Scotchman by birth and a ship-chandler for some years after his arrival in the city, about 1760. In the early seventies he became a bookseller, and meeting with success decided to see what more might be accomplished by opening a Circulating Library in connection with his regular business. Accordingly he advertised in *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer* on December 30, 1773, as follows:

*Samuel Loudon's*  
*Circulating Library*

**W**ILL be opened the first day of January 1774; subscriptions for reading, are taken in at his house, at 20 shillings per annum, half to be paid at subscribing. Occasional

<sup>1</sup> *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury. Printed at New-York, in East-New-Jersey. Saturday, Sept. 28, 1776.*





Chief Justice William Smith, Jr.

Organizer, 1754. Trustee, 1755-1756; 1757-1776



readers to pay by the week, or volume; the prices for which, with rules for reading, will be particularly affixed to the catalogue, which is now printing, and will be ready to deliver to the subscribers, and other readers, next month.

The design is set on foot at the desire of several very respectable inhabitants, and shall be conducted with all possible fidelity and diligence, in providing books, both instructive and entertaining, and written by authors of the most established reputation. It is hoped that all who approve of the undertaking, will do their utmost to encourage it, and without delay, as every body may see that it's existence and perfection, depends on the encouragement it meets with, by enabling the undertaker to provide, and keep in order, a sufficient number of valuable books.

A few weeks later, in *Gaine's Gazette and Mercury* for January 24, 1774, the catalogue was announced, "ready to be delivered to the subscribers, *gratis*." This would "shew a neat collection of books; to which the proprietor will be making additions by every opportunity of every new literary production of value." Meanwhile, those persons "willing to countenance the undertaking" were requested "to be speedy with their subscriptions."

In the same paper for November 21st following, Mr. Loudon advertises a new catalogue, the collection having increased to "upwards of a thousand volumes." The proprietor takes pleasure in informing "all such connoisseurs," as disparaged female intelligence and love of reading, that "the ladies are his best customers, and shew a becoming delicacy of taste in their choice of books." Lest this should arouse feeling, he hastens to add: "Neither are the gentlemen deficient in shewing the ladies a laudable example in this respect." The "prices for reading," payable in advance, were:



A year 20 shillings.

Half a year 12 shillings.

A quarter 8 shillings.

And occasional readers to  
pay one penny for each shilling  
the book they read is valued at.

The library open every week day, from morning till night.

And, from a "sketch of the rules," non-subscribers were

. . . to pay when each book is delivered, to give a note for the value of the book they receive, if required,—one book to be returned before another is delivered, the time allowed to read an octavo volume is one week, a quarto two weeks, and a folio four weeks,—readers in the country to be indulged with two or three volumes at a time, to be sent and returned (at their own risque and charge)—Books to be paid for if lost or abused.—Books are not to be lent by the subscribers.

A notice in Holt's *Journal* for February 23, 1775, reports "the addition of several hundred volumes," quoting a few attractive titles and adding, no less alluringly: "Novels, a variety; History, a considerable number; and sundry miscellaneous pieces." The proprietor promises that a "Supplement to the Library Catalogue" will soon appear, and that "every opportunity in his power shall be improved to increase the variety and number of useful Books, that his Library may be rendered more and more a lasting friend of knowledge and entertainment." The regulations continued the same, with these slight improvements, indicative of popularity: "The Library is open from morning to eight at night, and the Readers may have a Book exchanged if they please, every day, by their very humble servant, SAMUEL LOUDON."

Mr. Loudon must have been "encouraged" appreciably, for in January, 1776, he further extended his activities to include the publication of a weekly newspaper, *The New-York Packet*, and the *American Ad-*

*vertiser*. In a brief address he thanks the public for assurances of support, and presents "the compliments of the season to his kind Customers; wishing, that the year 1776 may be the happy *Æra*, in which Peace and Union, on a Constitutional Basis, shall be concluded between Great-Britain and her Colonies."

That his Circulating Library had also flourished is inferable from a notice in this same first number of his own paper, that it was "increased to upwards of Two Thousand Volumes." He again promised a supplementary list of books for subscribers "to annex with the Catalogue<sup>1</sup> they have already," and in conclusion thus announces a sort of exchange: "Ready money, or new books exchanged for any old library or parcel of books, particularly for history and well chosen novels, for the use of the Library."

This advertisement was renewed regularly until well into March. But the enterprise had not much longer to live. As a commercial venture, pure and simple, it was dependent on its proprietor's attention no less than upon popular "encouragement." In September, 1776, Mr. Loudon, a zealous Whig and patriot, announced his removal to Fishkill, "where the Provincial Congress now reside," in consequence of the city's invasion "by a powerful Fleet and Army."<sup>2</sup> Though he advertised a suspension of the *Packet* "for several Weeks" only, his departure meant the end of the second and last and apparently a successful Bookseller's Circulating Library in Colonial New York.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No copies of either the catalogue or the supplement are known to be in existence at the present writing.

<sup>2</sup> *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury*, Sept. 2, 9, 1776.

<sup>3</sup> Before the British had actually

left New York, however, Mr. Loudon resumed business at "No. 5, Water-Street, between the Coffee-House and Old Slip," where he advertised, in his *Packet* of Nov. 13, 1783, "to commence again," in Janu-

7. *The Union Library Society of New York, 1771-1776*

WITH the single exception of Garrat Noel's brief attempts to establish a Circulating Library as a commercial venture, the Society Library seems to have had the local field wholly to itself for more than seventeen years. At last, however, a rival appeared upon the scene. In December, 1771, there issued from the press of Samuel Inslee and Anthony Car, "at the New Printing-Office, on Beekman's-Slip," a twelve-page pamphlet, entitled "Articles of the Union Library Society of New-York."<sup>1</sup>

The objects of this new suitor for popular support are thus announced:

WHEREAS an advancement in knowledge and literature is a highly laudable pursuit, and attended with many advantages, as well to individuals as society in general; and as the private purchase of books is attended with an expence too heavy for many persons whose inclinations lead them to improvement; and we being sensible that the establishment of a public Library will greatly promote the attainment of so valuable an acquisition, have therefore, and by these presents do unite ourselves into a voluntary association, by the name of the UNION LIBRARY SOCIETY OF NEW-YORK, for the purpose of erecting and continuing a Library, for the benefit of ourselves, and all others who may chuse, upon the conditions prescribed, to become members thereof:

ary, 1784, "at the request of several respectable citizens," "THE CIRCULATING LIBRARY," containing about 2000 volumes. The fact of "the public Libraries of this city being in a great measure lost" made his enterprise "the more necessary and useful at present." Besides, "in point of convenience it had the

preference to the public Libraries, they being open only at certain hours, his at all hours of the day, and proper attendance given."

<sup>1</sup> The only copy known to be in existence is in the Society Library, having been presented by Henry Nicoll, a Trustee, in June, 1838.



Following this preamble come twenty regulations, "obligatory upon every member" and regarded "as a magna charta of the constitution," to be repealed "either altogether or in part" only by a three-fourths majority of the Society. In brief they direct all property of the institution to be held "in common, and not in joint tenancy," each member having the right to assign or devise his share. At the annual meeting, to be held on the first Tuesday in May, a Treasurer and twelve Directors must be chosen, such election to be in charge of a Secretary, "some fit person of the company," with the assistance of suitable inspectors. Vacancies in the directorate or treasurership were to be filled by the board, which was also to elect a President and Vice-President each year. The Directors were to meet on the second Tuesday of each month "at the place where the library shall be kept, or at some other fit place in the city," seven of their number, always including an officer, constituting a quorum; and they were entrusted with the entire management of affairs, even to removing the Treasurer for incompetency or neglect.

As in the case of the Society Library, the annual payment charge was fixed at ten shillings; but the subscription cost of a share or right, it is of interest to note, was the modest sum of twenty shillings, or only a fifth of the price charged throughout those years by the older organization. Penalties for "arrearages" were to be strictly enforced, offenders being "debarred the privilege of taking any book from the library." Each member was to have only one vote, however many shares he might own; and a very radical provision entitled a person holding more than one share to take out no more books than any other member. It is difficult to see in

this last prohibition any inducement to purchase extra shares.

The concluding article is a resolution nominating, "for the immediate putting in execution our useful designs," a list of twelve Directors and a Treasurer, "invested with full power and authority to enter immediately upon their respective offices," as follows: Walter Franklin, Jacob Watson, John Murray, Willet Seaman, Garret Rapalje, Benjamin Hugget, White Matlack, Lindley Murray, John Berrien, William Denning, James Mott and Benjamin Underhill, Directors, and Robert Bowne, Treasurer.

All of these names represent position and influence in the community, particularly among the mercantile element. Walter Franklin, the head of a large importing house, and Robert Bowne, a prosperous retail merchant, were afterwards original stockholders and directors of the Bank of New York, the former having been also a founder of the Chamber of Commerce in 1768, of which institution John Murray was later to become president. Garret Rapalje and Benjamin Hugget were for a number of years assistant aldermen, serving on important committees, in the days when the Common Council had jurisdiction over all departments of municipal administration. Lindley Murray, a member of the colonial bar, will ever be best known by the appellation of "the grammarian." Of the subsequent patriotic and useful career of William Denning, due notice will be taken in chronicling the history of the Society Library, which institution he served as Trustee for fifteen years, long after the Union Library Society had ceased to exist.

The little brochure closes with a clause of agreement and subscription, dated December 3, 1771. Unfortu-

nately the names of subscribers are not included, and it is not for over a year that their number is published. The first newspaper notice of the Society is found in *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury* for December 30th as follows:

**P**UBLIC NOTICE is hereby given to the Members of the *Union Library Society of New York*, and to all others who may choose to be concerned therein, That the Library Room will be opened at the House of Captain John Berrien, at Burling's-Slip, on Tuesday the Seventh of January next, at 3 o'Clock in the Afternoon of the same Day; where new Subscriptions are taken in, and printed Articles of the Society distributed: The Founders of this Institution flatter themselves with the Prospect of a speedy Advancement of so useful an Undertaking, as they conceive it founded upon Principals of Freedom and general Utility.

By Order of the Directors, JOSHUA WATSON, Sec'y.

Further particulars concerning the Society are but fragmentary, though informing. The first annual meeting was called for May 5, 1772, "at 4 o'Clock in the Afternoon, at the City-Hall," and a year later this function took place in "the Library Room" at ten in the morning, but the result of neither election was published. In the meantime the only obtainable statement regarding the size of the collection and membership had been proclaimed in the several papers of January, 1773, the books numbering "near 1000 volumes" and "continually receiving new additions," while there were 140 shareholders. The public was also informed that the subscription price had been advanced to "the small sum of thirty shillings."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The New York Journal*; or, 1773, and *The New-York Gazette, the General Advertiser*, Jan. 14, Jan. 25, 1773.



It thus appears that the newer institution, in membership at least, had gone far ahead of the Society Library, whose charter, recorded two months before, enumerates fifty-nine names. Also, the next reference to the Society reveals a turn of affairs far from pleasing to friends of the older Library. The situation is best described in the simple words of the original source, leaving the rest to the imagination. In the minutes of the Common Council for April 12, 1774, is found this entry:

THE PETITION of the Members of the union Library Society was preferred to this Board and Read, praying that this Board would be favourably pleased to Indulge them with the Eastermost part of the Room in which the books of the New York Societys Library are Contained, and this board having Viewed the Same unanimously agreed that the Same be Granted them, they being at the Expençe of a doar, and Making the Partitions required.<sup>1</sup>

By July, the necessary alterations and "doar" having doubtless been made, the Directors published a notice to members that the collection had been "removed to a Room in the Old City Hall, where attendance is given at the usual days and hours."<sup>2</sup> Fortune evidently smiling upon the institution, its terms were again advanced to "forty shillings original subscription money," though ten shillings continued to be the yearly charge. All the newspaper extracts give the name of Walter Franklin as President and show that Robert Bowne continued to serve as Treasurer.

But no lists of Directors or members and no catalogues are known to have been printed, nor, seemingly,

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the Common Council*, VIII, 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Journal; or, the General Advertiser*, July 28, 1774.

have any stray volumes survived the Revolution, when the Union Library Society, in company with other Libraries of the city, suffered irretrievable ruin in the

*The Petition of the Members of the Union Library Society was presented to this Board, and read, praying that this Board would be favourably pleased to Indulge them with the Eastmost part of the Room in which the Books of the New York Society Library are Contained, and this Board having ~~the~~ viewed the same unanimously agreed that the same be Granted them, they being at the Expense of ~~rebuilding~~ a Door, and Making the Partition required*

Entry (reduced) in Common Council minutes, April 12, 1774. See pp. 81, 116.

general dereliction. One valiant but vain attempt, so far as known, was made to rehabilitate the Society some years after the war, as evidenced by the following insertion in *The Daily Advertiser* for December 21, 1791:

NOTICE is hereby given to the subscribers of the Union Library, (which was established prior to the late war) that some business of importance, requiring attention, they are requested to meet on the evening of the 23d inst. at six o'clock, at Crosbie's Tavern, in Water street, between Peck and Beekman slip, where punctual attendance is desired.

JOHN MURRAY,  
In behalf of the Trustees.

The meeting, if held, was not reported in the papers, so that all hope of a restoration or renewal was prob-

ably abandoned. Thus all that remains to-day to bear witness to a once prosperous Library is the little old discolored prospectus of the Union Library Society, now treasured by its successful rival, the New York Society Library.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

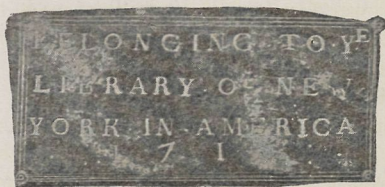
BRIEFLY reviewing the history of the efforts to establish an institutional Library in Colonial New York, we find that no fewer than six attempts were made toward that end, exclusive of the purely commercial Circulating Libraries, as follows:

1. The Trinity Parish Library, founded in 1698 by the Bishop of London through the instrumentality of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Bray, and reënforced by small additions from the same sources and by later private donations. So far as the vestry minutes reveal, on its almost complete destruction by fire in 1776, it could hardly have comprised over 450 volumes, some of which were saved. The only books of this collection known to have survived are now in the Library of the General Theological Seminary, with the single exception of the old Clarendon history, preserved in the Society Library.

2. The Sharpe Collection, given in 1713-1715 by Chaplain John Sharpe for a "Publick Library." Never securing an independent existence, it remained in the hands of private individuals until (probably) joined with the Corporation Library in 1730. In some way, as above conjectured, the majority of its 238 volumes survived the Revolution and are now to be seen in the Society Library.



3. The Corporation Library, New York's first real Public Circulating Library, originally the private collection of the Rev. Dr. John Millington, an English clergyman, who bequeathed it to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, by which Society the books, numbering 1642 volumes, were given to the city of New York. Arriving in 1730, they were kept in the City Hall, undergoing successive fluctuations of usefulness and desuetude, until scattered by the British troops in 1776.



Label (reduced) on second volume of Clarendon history (1711), now in Society Library. See pp. 20, 62, 118.

4. The New York Society Library, founded in 1754 and incorporated in 1772 as a Public Subscription Circulating Library by a number of well-to-do, enterprising citizens. Receiving immediate and gratifying support, and constantly enlarged by consignments of imported books, it was in a flourishing state when paralyzed by the approach and ravages of war. Practically exterminated by the atrocious vandalism of the British troops, scarcely a volume of its pre-Revolutionary collection is known to have survived save the Sharpe books, which, as part of the Corporation Library, were formerly in its care. Its Catalogue of 1773, the last issued

before the war, enumerates 1291 volumes, increased by later purchases to 1500 at least.

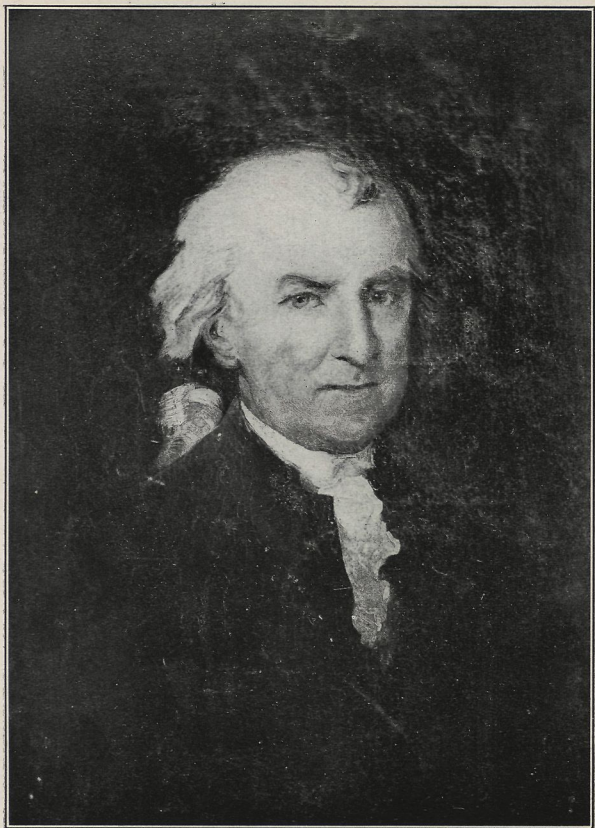
5. The Library of King's College, from its nature scarcely more public than the Parish Library, was established in 1757 through a bequest of the private library of Joseph Murray, Esq. It had received sundry gifts of books from the S. P. G. and other sources up to the time of its removal, in 1776, to the City Hall, where it also met with destruction. Its extent is not known at all, but probably approximated 2000 volumes.

6. The Union Library Society of New York, called into being in 1771, too late to secure a large collection within the succeeding fateful five years, though its advertisement of "near 1000 volumes" bespeaks its energy and growing importance.

Only one printed statement has come down as to the total number of volumes at the time of dispersion, but it is so plainly an exaggeration or a mistake, that it cannot be considered at all seriously as it stands. Justice Jones says that the British soldiers stole from the City Hall, besides the King's College collection, "all the books belonging to the subscription library, as also of a valuable library which belonged to the Corporation, the whole consisting of not less than 60,000 volumes."<sup>1</sup> One of these ciphers must be a typographical error, for 6000 is the more probable figure for the combined assortment.

Of these six collections, then, all were prostrated by the war. Of two of them, the Union Library Society and the Corporation Library, not a vestige has survived. Of two others, the Sharpe Collection and the Trinity

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jones. *History of New York during the Revolutionary War*. Vol. I, p. 136.



Hon. John Watts, Sr.

Trustee, 1754-1755; 1756-1776. Treasurer, 1754-1755





Parish Library, the former is by far the better preserved, but it plainly has never, at any stage of its career, been a working Library, while the latter lives to-day only in a few fragments. The only ones that arose from the ashes of their former selves, the New York Society Library and the King's (Columbia) College Library, were forced to make a wholly fresh start in life, the few relics of their early collections not being restored for many years. A handful of the King's College books are preserved in the Library of Columbia University to-day, while the Society Library can show but two books, besides the Clarendon history and the Sharpe Collection, that are of undoubted Colonial Library ownership.

From this consideration of the Library in Colonial New York, the reader will not turn with any great degree of pride in the general cultural attainments of the capital city of the province, let alone evidences of Library science. And yet the facts of the case belie the statement in Grahame's history already quoted,<sup>1</sup> that "the great bulk of the people were strangers even to the first rudiments of science and cultivation, till the era of the American Revolution." For all through the English colonial period one finds traces of increasing cultivation and refinement. As far back as 1668, Col. Francis Lovelace, the second English governor, is said to have written home: "I find some of these people have the breeding of courts, and I cannot conceive how such is acquired."<sup>2</sup> Still earlier, in 1643, the "Inventory of the personal property of the Widow Bronck at Emaus" enumerates over fifty books and pamphlets, the collection of "the late Jonas Bronck."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there are in the

<sup>1</sup> *Supra* p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> But see p. 32n2.

<sup>3</sup> *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, vol. XIV, p. 42.

New York Public Library to-day several volumes that once formed a part of the personal collection of the Rev. John Miller, chaplain at the fort from 1692 to 1695.

Governors Hunter and Burnet were themselves owners of libraries and scholarly in their tastes, while Governor Montgomerie, though not so regarded, left a library of about 1400 volumes.<sup>1</sup> Among the colonists, furthermore, there were all along men of literary appreciation, with their own private collections: for example, Col. Lewis Morris, Robert Elliston, James De Lancey, William Smith, James Alexander, Cadwalader Colden, Joseph Murray, David Clarkson and others.<sup>2</sup> Such was the type of men who not only perceived the permanent value of a Public Library but gave to their ideas enduring embodiment in the form of the New York Society Library, whose history is now to be related.

<sup>1</sup> See notice in *The New-York Gazette* in May, 1732, advertising its sale.

<sup>2</sup> Executors of estates sometimes advertised in the newspapers for the

return of volumes belonging thereto: e.g., John Pintard (the elder) asks for the borrowed books of William Searle, deceased, in *The Gazette and Post-Boy*, Nov., 1747.



## I

### THE FOUNDING OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, 1754

**I**N the spring of 1754, when the New York Society Library first drew breath, the position held by what is now the United States in world affairs was truly insignificant. Regarded and treated chiefly as appendages to the British crown, restricted in commerce, and with inventive and mechanical instincts kept in leash, the colonies were indeed but scattered "plantations," clinging closely to the Atlantic seaboard. Numbering all told only about 1,370,000 souls, or less than a third of the present population of New York city alone, the English colonists, furthermore, differed as widely in their institutional life as in their geographical location. Yet in spite of all this and their primitive means of intercourse, the idea of nationality was already beginning to find expression.

Across the water, the reign of old George the Second had still more than six years to run, while America's future "tyrant" was but a lad of fifteen, with traits of temperament all unguessed. On the decaying French throne lolled Louis the Well Beloved, whose ill-starred successor was yet to see the light this same year; and over a twelvemonth was to pass before the tragic name

of Marie Antoinette would become a household term at the Austrian court,—in their very cradles innocent victims of that unnatural state alliance formed to crush the great Frederick. All Europe was taking a moment's breath before plunging into the Seven Years' War, from which Prussia was to emerge a power.

As landmarks in the progress of the arts of peace, it will be recalled that only a year earlier the British Museum had been founded, and that not long afterward Dr. Johnson published his famous dictionary. In the new world, too, significant signs of culture were not lacking. Already four colleges, Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, and Princeton, were in existence; and within a few months still a fifth was to be chartered in close proximity to the new Library—King's College, known ever since the Revolution as Columbia.

The year 1754 is notable in American annals. It marks the outbreak of the fiercest and fortunately the last of the intercolonial struggles, the French and Indian War, whose chief benefits to the English provincials, besides the prestige of final victory, were their experience in coöperation and their training for that sterner and more momentous conflict, of which few had so much as dreamed. At the celebrated Albany Congress, opened in June by Lieutenant-Governor De Lancey, Benjamin Franklin submitted his Plan of Union, so clever that it was rejected by both the colonies and the home government for the advantages supposably given the other side. And it was in an early episode of the war that a young Virginia colonel at Fort Necessity was learning lessons in patience and self-reliance, and undergoing a discipline, that in after years were justly to earn for him the title, "Father of his Country."

None of the colonies showed a bolder front or greater foresight in preparing for this contest than New York. Its energetic executive, James De Lancey, as a native of the province was the better able to discern the various needs and perils of the hour. His recommendations found full favor with the Lords of Trade, who approved his view of New York city, as "in all respects the most proper place for a general Magazine of Arms and Military stores."<sup>1</sup> As it was the provincial capital throughout the colonial era, there consequently existed a close association between the two governing boards. Often the mayor was appointed to the governor's council, whose members frequently mingled with assemblymen and common councilmen in the corridors of the City Hall.

By this time New York may fairly be said to have attained a well-defined organization. Granted a nominal charter by Director Stuyvesant in 1653, the city, ever since the arrival of Governor Andros, in 1674, had been ruled under the English municipal system, with such modifications as changing conditions brought about. A truly distinctive character had gradually come into being from the very composition of the community; in earliest times cosmopolitan tendencies were pronounced, and before the middle of the seventeenth century the city's population was claimed to include well-nigh a score of nationalities. These various elements had fused harmoniously at length, a circumstance serving to counteract that spirit of provincialism so natural to colonial life.

Then, as now, and in fact throughout its history, the chief resource of the city was its commercial acumen. In the words of a contemporary historian, New York

<sup>1</sup> *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, VI, 1016.



was "the Metropolis and grand Mart of the Province," commanding "by its commodious Situation . . . also all the Trade of the Western Part of Connecticut and that of East Jersey." " 'No season,' " he quotes, " 'prevents our Ships from launching into the Ocean. During the greatest Severity of Winter, an equal, unrestrained, Activity runs through all Ranks, Orders, and Employments.' " <sup>1</sup> Trading monopolies and the rich harvests reaped from privateering had laid the foundations of many a local fortune and had brought prosperity to the city.

But for all that, New York was a smaller place than either Philadelphia or Boston. Barely 12,000 people could be counted within its gates, then not far apart, for little land had as yet been reclaimed from the rivers, while the Fields, the present City Hall Park, lay well outside the inhabited portion.

In those days, as for over half a century before, and for as many years to follow, the City Hall stood in Wall street at the head of Broad. Here were discussed all matters relating to the welfare of the community. It will therefore be of interest to regard briefly the concerns of the city fathers, at a time when no salary but great honor attached to the office of alderman, while to be mayor was accounted an imperishable dignity. For the most trustworthy source of information one should turn to the old minutes of the Common Council, so carefully kept by the city clerks throughout the hundred years ending with the British occupation in 1776.

At a glance, one is impressed with their alertness and attention to civic interests. First in importance at that

<sup>1</sup> William Smith. *The History of the Province of New-York*. London,

1757. P. 188. The author does not give the source of his quotation.

time, naturally enough, would come preparation for suitable defense. Not only were constables paid for "Severall Nights and Days Watchings," but masters of all incoming vessels were notified to report within two hours of arrival the names of strangers carried as passengers, under penalty of forty shillings for each default. A "thousand stand of arms" was ordered from England, each musket to be "fixed with a Bayonet, one Catridge box and a Belt." Again, all freemen were to be taxed for an appropriation of not above £3500 for a new barracks in the Fields, to be built by "the most principall Carpenters," to accommodate 800 men; upon completion it was regularly kept supplied with firewood, candles and straw. As an expedient for raising funds, the Common Council—as had been done in the case of founding King's College—petitioned the assembly for leave to start a lottery, "beeing apprehensive of a Warr with France."

To matters of the general weal a similar devotion seems to have been shown. New streets were laid out from time to time, while some of the travel-worn thoroughfares would be ordered paved or leveled. Fines were exacted of persons refusing to serve in elective positions, a special exception being made in the case of one constable-elect, Caleb Shrieve, "screaned by being a Quaquer." The poorhouse, City Hall and other public buildings were kept in constant repair, and a pest-house and a new jail were in process of erection. One citizen was regularly paid for "taking Care of the City Lamps," another received quarterly instalments for services as "publick Whipper," still a third was designated as "Publick Inviter to ffuneralls,"—this last functionary plainly showing title to Dutch origin.

For over a score of years a fire department had been in operation, the firemen receiving individual appointment from the Common Council. For precaution's sake new wells were sunk in the streets, as had long been the custom, and a special ordinance forbade the storing of turpentine or pitch within the corporate limits.

Frequent regulations attest to the watchfulness of the city's guardians over the health of their charge, stringent laws calling for cleanliness in streets and market places. One ordinance in particular prohibited the selling of oysters between May 15th and the middle of August, thus showing familiarity with the phenomena of the months without the "r"! At a time when small-pox was reported as rampant in Philadelphia, the Amboy boat was ordered held up for inspection, Bedlow's Island being the quarantine station.

In the direction of public charities a beginning had long been made. The city's poor and destitute received attention from regularly chosen church wardens and city vestrymen, officials quite distinct from those of Trinity parish. Physicians were summoned at the Corporation's expense to attend sick debtors or other prisoners in their durance.

There was greater opportunity for simple recreation in those days; people took life more leisurely than in the hurry-worry of the present age. Citizens then had their out-of-door sports close at hand; and their social diversions resembled nothing so much as great family gatherings, for the local gentry were nearly all related, by marriage at least. Political discussions at taverns and coffee-houses were doubtless as convincing as any held to-day, though possibly more moderate, as the practice of dueling tended to set a guard on men's lips. Smith



the historian characterizes New York as "one of the most social Places on the Continent," where "the Men collect themselves into weekly Evening Clubs," and "the Ladies, in Winter, are frequently entertained either at Concerts of Musick or Assemblies, and make a very good Appearance."<sup>1</sup>

For a charming glimpse of the customary round of outings as the seasons changed, behold the following picture from the journal of an English traveler:<sup>2</sup>

Their amusements are . . . balls, and sleighing expeditions in the winter; and, in the summer, going in parties upon the water, and fishing; or making excursions into the country. There are several houses, pleasantly situated upon East river, near New York, where it is common to have turtle-feasts: these happen once or twice in a week. Thirty or forty gentlemen and ladies meet and dine together, drink tea in the afternoon, fish and amuse themselves till evening, and then return home in Italian chaises, (the fashionable carriage in this and most parts of America, . . . ) a gentleman and lady in each chaise. In the way there is a bridge, about three miles distant from New York, which you always pass over as you return, called the Kissing-bridge; where it is a part of the etiquette to salute the lady who has put herself under your protection.

All these forms of enjoyment were of course made possible only by the underlying commercial prosperity. Numerous and powerful as were the merchants of New York, however, there was yet another class of society even more instrumental in lending weight and distinction to the advancing community. The commanding influence of the legal fraternity, in shaping a colonial

<sup>1</sup> William Smith. *History of New-York*. London, 1757. P. 211.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Andrew Burnaby, D.D.

*Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America*. Pp. 738-739. See p. 88n.

attitude toward arbitrary policies of the home government during the stirring times then beginning, was as freely admitted by the British ministry as by its agents on this side of the ocean. And the leaders of the New York bar of that day stood second to none in learning, in forensic ability, or in their patriotic breadth of view.

From such a people knowledge was bound to receive recognition. Amongst enterprising men of affairs there were a number of distinctly scholarly minds, besides many others thirsting for literary advantages or plain general information, for themselves and particularly for their families. This instinct had been developed in the case of wealthier citizens to the extent of some notable private collections of books, as already mentioned.<sup>1</sup> To the exclusive cultivation of this spirit, however laudable in itself, may be attributed in some degree the prevailing apathy hitherto shown toward maintaining a Public Library.

Yet from a coterie of these very persons came the impetus and guidance that carried to a successful issue the plan of establishing a Subscription Library. Smith's history tells how "the project was started at an evening convention of a few private friends," with the aim of "promoting a spirit of inquiry among the people."<sup>2</sup> As likely as not the little gathering was held at the home of the Hon. James Alexander, a renowned place of meeting to discuss current affairs. The same printed source gives likewise the names of these conspirers for good as follows: Philip Livingston, William Alexander, Robert R. Livingston, William Livingston, John Morin Scott, "and one other person." This last, with a rea-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> William Smith. *The History of*

*the Late Province of New-York.*  
New York, 1830. Vol. II, p. 207.



Samuel Bard, M.D., LL.D.

Trustee, 1769-1776; 1788-1793; 1796

Secretary, 1769-1776; 1788-1789





sonable amount of certainty, may be pronounced to have been the author himself, for William Smith, Jr., was boon companion to several of these men, and he manifestly writes as one having authority.

Their ultimate and liberal aim, our chronicler adds, comprehended "an incorporation by royal charter and the erection of an edifice, at some future day, for a Museum and an Observatory, as well as a Library."<sup>1</sup> Athwart this pleasing picture there darts a reminiscent gleam of poor John Sharpe's unrealized yearnings. Is not that optimist, therefore, vindicated at last in this approaching consummation of his cherished designs? And is he not freed forthwith from any charge of fanaticism, when active men of affairs follow his lead, and even dream of founding also these additional public benefits, unattainable for years to come?

But these dreamers, if you will, were not content with seeing visions. They began earnestly to embody their ideas in living form, and they were of just the creative spirit to breathe the breath of life into any undertaking. Ardent, young,—ranging from twenty-five to thirty-eight years of age,—but well disciplined, they were the acknowledged leaders of an association called the Whig Club, a center of opposition to the royalist or government party. Of good birth themselves, they had ready access to persons of standing in the community. The historian records laconically their initial steps: "To engage all parties in the subscription, it was carried first to the lieutenant-governor and the council,"<sup>2</sup> nearly all of whom gave prompt signature, the Library records show.

At this point it is fitting to learn something about the six young men who had set this abiding work in opera-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207—208.

tion. All were destined to lives of eminent usefulness and, in some instances, to enduring fame.

Of Philip Livingston, fourth son of the second lord of the manor, it is almost enough to say that he was to be a signer of the Declaration of Independence. A Yale graduate, he turned his attention to business and acquired a handsome fortune, which he freely offered to sustain the credit of his country. Throughout his busy life he devoted himself to public interests, serving as an alderman for eight years; as a member of the assembly, where he was speaker for a time; and as a delegate to the First and Second Continental Congresses, of which latter body he was a member at the time of his death. Moreover, religious matters were close to his heart; throughout his life he maintained allegiance to the Reformed Dutch Church, serving that denomination as deacon and as elder for years. Truly the house founded by the original Robert, the Albany fur trader and promoter, gained greatly in public esteem in its third generation. Talents and resources, such as the first lord of the manor had applied to his own purposes, were generously placed at the disposal of their fellow-beings by not a few of his descendants.

William Livingston, a younger brother, was also graduated from Yale College, where he took highest honors. He studied law with James Alexander and William Smith in turn, at the same time imbibing their political ideas. But he was original and forceful, soon advancing to the front of his chosen calling, though bitterly denounced by opponents as a "Presbyterian lawyer,"—a term implying seditious views toward the government, as well as indicating his denominational affiliation, for at this time he was a trustee of that



church. He compelled attention and won renown as the author of numerous brilliant pamphlet articles, published under the titles, "The Independent Reflector" and "The Watch-Tower." Although he took up his residence in New Jersey in 1760, he retained an active interest in the Library, appreciation of which was shown by his continued election as Trustee from its foundation until 1773, or nineteen years. To prove his sincerity in recommending abolition he freed all his own slaves. Representing his adopted province and state in all three Continental Congresses, and in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as well, he ranks as one of the most eminent patriots and statesmen of New Jersey, of which he was the first governor under independence.

Closely identified with the brothers in this enterprise was their cousin, Robert R. Livingston, third of the name in the direct line. Achieving eminence at the provincial bar, he was appointed a judge in admiralty, and for the last twelve years of his life was an associate justice of the supreme court. As a delegate to the Stamp Act Congress, he opposed the compulsory acceptance of the hateful paper; but he showed conservatism on the question of American independence. Reputed the wealthiest land owner in New York, he died in 1775, before it was necessary to declare for one side or the other. In church affiliations, Anglican, though a Whig in politics, his services as a vestryman of Trinity parish ceased only with his death. Judge Livingston's trusteeship in the Library covered eighteen years, from the beginning, and was perpetuated in that of his still more distinguished son and namesake.

Mention has several times been made of the historian, William Smith, Jr. For years a law partner of Wil-

liam Livingston, and associated with his personal friends in local politics, a man of attainments though of strong bias, he also was to find a parting of the ways on the question of independence. While "all his sympathies were with the individual rebel, none were with the rebellion that severed the new from old England." Before this occurred he had been a useful member of society as lawyer and jurist, and as a trustee of the Presbyterian Church. After the Revolution he continued allegiance to the crown in Canada, where an honorable career was in store for him as chief justice.

Another "Presbyterian lawyer"—as also a trustee of that church, and a man of great influence, as both writer and speaker—was John Morin Scott. For some years an alderman and later a member of the provincial convention and of the Continental Congress, as also of the local committee of safety, he was no less full of martial ardor. One of the founders of the famous Sons of Liberty, he acted a gallant part in the battle of Long Island, retiring from the war as brigadier-general. Thereafter he held such positions of honor as state senator, member of Congress, and secretary of state in New York.

The last but by no means the least significant name in this little group is that of William Alexander, son of the eminent advocate and councilor, James Alexander, and known in American history as the titular Earl of Stirling. Beginning life in mercantile pursuits, he was made an army contractor by General Shirley and later became his private secretary. At an early age he was appointed to the governor's council of New York and subsequently of New Jersey, where, like his brother-in-law, William Livingston, he dwelt in considerable state. Well in-

formed on literary and scientific subjects, a member of the board of governors of King's College, he was also a man of action; for he played a distinguished rôle in the Revolution, participating conspicuously in notable engagements, for which services he was rewarded with the thanks of Congress on several occasions and with a major-general's commission. Held in high esteem by Washington, whom he was said greatly to resemble in personal appearance, he was characterized at the time of his death, just before the war closed, as "possessed of great bravery, perseverance and extraordinary military talent."<sup>1</sup> By birth and marriage Lord Stirling was related to leading houses of the province. It is a family tradition that his cultivated mother, Mistress Polly Spratt Alexander, in her strong public spirit and desire for improvement, had suggested the Library idea to her son and his friends."<sup>2</sup>

This was early in March, 1754. Within little more than one month they effected an organization, chose a board of Trustees, and, still more to the point, raised by private subscription a sum sufficiently ample to sustain the enterprise. Its first press notice appeared in *The New-York Mercury* for April 8th, as follows:

A Subscription is now on Foot, and carried on with great Spirit, in order to raise Money for erecting and maintaining a publick Library in this City; and we hear that not less than 70 Gentlemen have already subscribed *Five Pounds* Principal, and *Ten Shillings per Annum*, for that Purpose. We make no doubt but a Scheme of this Nature, so well calculated for promoting Lit-

<sup>1</sup> Elias Boudinot, President of the Continental Congress, to General Washington, Philadelphia, Jan. 29, 1783. "Letters to Washington," xcii,

132. MS. Archives, Dept. of State, Washington.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer. *The Goede Vrouw of Mana-ha-ta*. New York, 1898. P. 382.



erature, will meet with due Encouragement from all who wish the Happiness of the rising Generation.<sup>1</sup>

A considerable number of citizens having become interested, there had been drawn up on April 2d the "ARTICLES OF THE SUBSCRIPTION ROLL OF THE NEW YORK LIBRARY," under which the institution was to prosper for more than eighteen years, or until a charter was secured, in November, 1772. Its objects are announced briefly and without ostentation in these simple phrases,—the first now held in light esteem, though then reserved for dignified occasions,—"*Whereas* a Publick Library would be very useful, as well as ornamental to this City & may be also advantageous to our intended College." The sentence concludes with business-like directness: "We whose Names are hereunto subscribed, in order to promote the Design of erecting one in this City, do promise to pay Five Pounds New York Currency, each on the first Day of May next ensuing the Date hereof."

They further agreed to a yearly assessment of ten shillings and to an annual election of twelve Trustees, to be chosen from subscribers or their assigns at the Exchange in Broad street, between eleven o'clock and noon on the last Tuesday in April. The Trustees were empowered to appropriate funds toward the purchase of books, and to select a repository for them; to appoint a "Library Keeper" at a "propper Sallary"; to regulate the terms of loans; and "to do every Thing they shall judge necessary to erect, preserve, ornament & improve the said Library," under clearly outlined directions.

<sup>1</sup> This same notice was printed under New York news in the Philadelphia papers of April 11th, but not in Boston papers at all, which is sur-

prising in view of its character, even though there was less affinity between those two towns.

Then follow fourteen "Regulations" for the government of the institution and the guidance of its Trustees. The main features comprise the "Right to take out one Book at a Time," with the stipulation, foreign to mod-

NEW-YORK, April 8.

A Subscription is now on Foot, and carried on with great Spirit, in order to raise Money for erecting and maintaining a publick Library in this City; and we hear that not less than 70 Gentlemen have already subscribed Five Pounds Principal, and Ten Shillings per Annum, for that Purpose. We make no Doubt but a Scheme of this Nature, so well calculated for promoting Literature, will meet with due Encouragement from all who wish the Happiness of the Rising Generation.

Last Tuesday Morning £. 150, in Counterfeit British Half-pence, was seized in a House in this City, by George Harrison, Esq; Surveyor and Searcher of his Majesty's Customs. [*Such Assiduity as this, in making two considerable Seizures within a Fortnight's Time, will, we trust, be an effectual Step towards preventing the Importation of Counterfeit Copper Halfpence into this Province, so prejudicial to the Country in general, and the fair Trader in particular; and will, undoubtedly, reflect no less Honour on one so zealous for the Good of the Common Weal, than Dis honour on the Person or Persons who may at Times import them, contrary to the express Words of the Act of Assembly of this Province, lately made and provided in that Behalf.*]

*Customs-House, New-York, Inward Entries.*

Sloop Herring, A. Cuzzens from Jamaica. Outwards. Sloop Little David, J. Philispon for Newfoundland. Sloop Elizabeth, C. Miller for Virginia. Brig Fanny, Edward Kendrick for Nevis. Sloop Ann, B. Richards for Barbados. Brig William, J. Roome for Lishon. Snow Mesopotamia, A. Rutgers for New-Castle. Snow Charming Sally, T. White for Port Dover. Cleared. Sloop Master Mason, J. Crew, Sloop Unity, Hezekiah Sawyer, and Sloop Batchelor, D. Cox to Nova-Scotia. Sloop Weymouth, J. Conklin to Boston. Brig Elizabeth, Josias Smith to V. Islands. Sloop Kingston, John Ebberts to Montserrat, Schooner Hampton, J. Cramer to Antigua. Sicop Dolphin, Thomas Ramsey to Jamaica. Brig Columbus, A. Brown to Medeta. Sloop Bumper, A. Hunter to Giasgow.

First press notice of the Society Library. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 11, 1754 (facsimile size). See pp. 135-136.

ern ways, requiring a deposit "in Cash, at least one third more than the value of it"; that the length of the loan "be proportioned as nearly as possible to the Bulk of the Volumn," together with certain penalties for delinquents; and that the majority of members might, at any annual meeting, amend the instrument. The Trustees

were to be elected by ballot, should serve "Gratis," and might appoint a Treasurer, "at a proper Allowance for his Trouble," who, however, could not be one of their number; and they were to be held responsible for the financial status of their charge.

Individual shares or "rights" might be bequeathed, inherited or alienated, "as of any other Chattel"; but, no matter how many rights he might possess, each subscriber was to have only one vote. It is interesting to observe how the term "right"—meaning a share—has been carefully retained to the present day as one of the distinguishing marks of the Society Library. It is also of interest to note, retrospectively, that the liberal intent of the donors of the Corporation Library was here perpetuated in part, by the provision that all privileges, including the loan of books, should be extended to any resident of the province at large.

On the eve of the first election for Trustees this notice, here copied from *The New-York Gazette: or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, for April 29th, was inserted in the current newspapers:

**T**HE GENTLEMEN, who are *Subscribers* to the PUBLIC-LIBRARY, which is to be erected in this City, are hereby *Notified*, that To-morrow, being the *last Tuesday* in *April*, is the Day appointed by the Subscription Articles for their Meeting; in order to elect *Twelve* TRUSTEES, who are to have the immediate Care and Management of the said *Library*, for the Year ensuing. They are therefore desired to convene for that Purpose, *To-morrow morning* at *Eleven o'Clock*, at the *EXCHANGE Coffee-Room* in *Broad-Street*. As it will be the first public Transaction of the Subscribers, in Advancement of this excellent and useful Design, it is hoped, that Gentlemen will not fail to give a very general Attendance.



Not a whisper of the proceedings at this first balloting for Trustees has reached our ears. It is perhaps too much to expect to find no politics in the affair, considering the temper of the six originators; and especially in view of the fact that in the same year King's College was nearly strangled at birth by sectarian dissensions, with their underlying political motives. That there *was* politics in this election is made very plain from a long article, number XXV of "The Watch-Tower" series, in the *Mercury* for May 12, 1755, signed "B."<sup>1</sup>

After explaining the intent of the founders as "well judging that an Acquaintance with Books would tend to unshackle the Minds of their fellow Subjects," the outburst proceeds with increasing bitterness:

No sooner were the Subscriptions compleat, and a Day appointed for the Election of Trustees, than a dirty Scheme was concerted, for excluding as many *English* Presbyterians as possible, from the Trusteeship; concerted, not by *Trinity Church* in this City, but by some of her unworthy Members: Which Distinction is here carefully taken, to prevent those contracted Bigots from misrepresenting the Sentiments of an Author, who for the Reasons abovementioned, holds that, and all other Protestant Churches, in the highest Veneration. This Scheme a certain Gentleman in this Province undertook to execute; and by his Emissaries dispersed among the Subscribers a Number of Copies of such a List of Trustees, as best suited his known Humour and Inclination, and advised many of them carefully to avoid electing any Presbyterians to the Trusteeship. Strongly prepossessed in favour of his own judicious Choice, the good Man doubtless expected it would be submitted to by many of the Subscribers with a most obsequious Deference. How well his Expectations were answered, the Event of

<sup>1</sup> Probably the Rev. Aaron Burr, D.D., president of the college at Princeton, for he was closely asso-

ciated with William Livingston in the preparation of these articles.

that Election will best determine. Thus much however is certain, that in Spite of his utmost Efforts, the Subscribers were so obstinately impartial, as to chuse Persons who, from their Acquaintance with Literature, they imagined were able to make a proper Collection of Books.

Nevertheless, we can only conjecture whether the elections were close, whether there really was active rivalry for the honor, or whether some of the nominees may not have accepted their new responsibilities reluctantly, questioning the outcome. The gathering itself, composed of representative citizens, met in the new Exchange at the foot of Broad street, and was probably as large as often assembled for any purpose. The result bears witness to the intelligence and wisdom of the voters. Of the twelve gentlemen chosen to the first board of Trustees of the Society Library, three were founders, Robert R. Livingston, William Livingston and William Alexander. Upon the remaining nine members attention will next be directed, to learn what manner of men they were, these guardians over the earliest days of the institution we behold to-day, time-honored but virile and full of promise. In response to our invocation the muse of history will now summon them one at a time, for a brief and reverent review.

First among these twelve apostles of culture rises the august figure of his Honor James De Lancey, Esquire, lieutenant-governor of the province of New York throughout this decade, and for thirty years chief justice of the supreme court. Scarcely past the prime of life, handsome, brilliant, imperious yet urbane, he lived and moved in a style commensurate with his dignities and great wealth. The very rumbling of his gilded coach over the rough city streets, no less than the gracious but

stately inclination of his flowing peruke, proclaimed the majesty of the law and the power of the crown whose servant he was. In political astuteness without a peer, respected and admired for his quick penetration and unfailing good judgment, and popular for his affable manners, James De Lancey wielded an influence over the men of his day exceeded by no other individual in New York prior to the Revolution.

Next comes the Hon. Joseph Murray, a man of sober mien, for years the foremost constitutional lawyer of the province, his Majesty's attorney-general, a member of the council and the chief exponent of the royalist view. Serving Trinity parish as vestryman and warden for many years, he was also often retained by the Common Council in its litigations, usually declining compensation. In 1728 his disinterestedness was recognized in bestowing upon him the freedom of the city. Devoted to the welfare of King's College, of which he was one of the first governors, he bequeathed to it a handsome legacy and his private collection of valuable books, which formed the nucleus of the College Library. Although somewhat advanced in life, he was still the acknowledged leader of the colonial bar.

Close upon his heels treads the Hon. John Chambers, often pitted against him in council deliberations, as an uncompromising foe of government by prerogative, demanding for provincials the freeholder rights of Englishmen. With Mr. Murray, in return for gratuitous legal services, he had been complimented with the freedom of the city by the Common Council, of which body he was afterward a member. He was also concerned with Trinity Church affairs, a vestryman for years and succeeding Mr. Murray as warden. An associate justice



of the supreme court, he had been identified with that great advocate, Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia, in securing the acquittal of the printer Zenger, nearly twenty years before, whereby freedom of the press was established in New York.

As though seeking to soften the ardor of their discussions with words of peace, there now advances from the shadows the benign and somberly clad form of the Rev. Henry Barclay, D.D., second rector of Trinity Church. For years a devoted laborer among the Mohawks, he had been induced some time before to take up the mantle of the Rev. William Vesey. He was to find amongst the elect as bitter feuds as prevailed in his own heathen field, but these he set out resolutely to bring to reconciliation. Displaying unusual adaptability, he won from the cultivated and well-to-do the same high regard so openly accorded him by the poor Indian.

Our study now centers in the grave and dignified personality of the Hon. James Alexander, long a member of the council, sometime attorney-general and advocate-general, and venerated as an oracle by his associates at the bar. In addition to his legal learning, he had marked capacity for scientific research, becoming with Dr. Franklin and others a founder of the American Philosophical Society. One writer says that he was "equally distinguished for his humanity, generosity, great abilities and honourable stations." One of the leading actors in the dramatic Zenger episode, for his boldness in criticising the bench he suffered temporary disbarment and loss of conciliar honors. Restoration followed soon, however, the grand jury and Common Council drawing up elaborate testimonials to his character and ability. On the passage of the Montgomerie charter in 1731, he had



Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, LL.D.

Trustee, 1773-1774; 1788-1793





been given the freedom of the city, together with James De Lancey and William Smith. For years he was the mouthpiece of the popular party, though not gifted as a speaker, directing public sentiment through the columns of John Peter Zenger's *Weekly Journal*.

In the Hon. John Watts the Library had a powerful supporter, for he was a leader in the province, socially and politically. A merchant prince of business life above reproach, he was ever active and far-sighted in promoting the welfare of his fellow-citizens. He was foremost in the erection of the Exchange in 1752, to which he later "with others" presented a large clock; and he was deeply interested in the establishment of the New York Hospital, of which society he was the first president, from 1770 till a successor was chosen in 1784. As speaker of the assembly and while a member of the council, Mr. Watts allied himself closely with the policies of his intimate friend and brother-in-law, James De Lancey; and afterward, as attorney-general under Governor Monkton, he showed his partisanship so strongly, that he is said to have been designated as the next royal governor, had the war terminated otherwise. Yet he was withal a most intrepid denouncer of injustice, and was the only one among them all who faced the Earl of Loudoun to oppose the quartering of troops in the city in 1756. A Trustee of the Society Library for twenty years, his attention to its interests ceased only with his removal, in 1775, to England, where he died an exile, bereft of his great estates.

A wholly different element of New York's social structure now demands representation—a class the most fundamental of all, the mercantile. In the person of the Hon. William Walton there appears more of the mod-

ern self-made man than is generally to be seen in the grandees of that day. The most prominent member of a noted family, he both inherited and acquired great wealth. Through certain trade preferences conceded by the Spaniards of Florida and the West Indies, and by dexterous privateering during the French war, the Waltons literally coined money. A man of strong public spirit he, as well as John Watts, refused all compensation while representing the city in the assembly. Established in the most elegant private dwelling in the colonies, and a member of the governor's council, Captain Walton maintained so lavish an hospitality, that stories of his entertainments, replete with gold and silver service, were adduced in Parliament as proofs positive that the colonists were not impoverished by so-called repressive acts.

The lot next falls upon Benjamin Nicoll, Esq., a man in middle life. Carefully fitted for Yale by his stepfather, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson, first president of King's College, he subsequently entered the legal profession in New York, where he had become at his untimely demise, in 1760, "a Lawyer of great note, . . . than whom no man was ever more lamented throughout this province."<sup>1</sup> So wrote his afflicted parent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but without exaggeration, to judge from his record as a devoted Trustee of the Library up to the time of his death, as also a vestryman of Trinity Church and a governor of King's College, of the movement to establish which institution he is said to have been, with Dr. Johnson, "the life and soul." His public career comprised several years' service as an assemblyman of conservative leanings, and an appointment, at

<sup>1</sup> *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, VII, 441.

the very time our story opens, to act with Joseph Murray, William Smith, Cadwallader Colden and William Livingston on an important commission to settle the boundary question with Massachusetts. Years afterward the final adjustment of this matter accorded with the findings of the New York commissioners.

Last of all we are introduced to one of the youngest and cleverest of the little company, William Peartree Smith, a second cousin of the historian, and of a family long identified with New York. His grandfather, William "Port Royal" Smith, an alderman for many years, was son-in-law to Col. William Peartree, mayor of the city from 1703 to 1706. During his residence in New York he was for some years a trustee of the Presbyterian Church. A classmate and life-long intimate of William Livingston, he also took up his residence in New Jersey, where he had earlier been instrumental in the founding of the college at Princeton. At one time secretary of the province of New Jersey, he acted in 1774 as chairman of its general committee of correspondence, and was sent the next year as delegate to the Continental Congress. Genuinely interested in literature, as also an ardent patriot, he was widely known as a writer of both prose and verse in his country's cause; for a time he had been associated with William Livingston in editing the "Independent Reflector." After the Revolution he held various positions of honor in his adopted state.

From this review of the individuals composing the first board of Trustees of the New York Society Library, there is no question as to the sagacity of the subscribers in their choice. These twelve gentlemen represented as a whole the best that the province



afforded in position, cultivation, attainments, native ability and character. Their very difference in age was a good omen, as well as the variety in their lines of activity. It is of interest further to note that, as regards political affiliation, six of them were of one party and half a dozen of the other: Messrs. De Lancey, Murray, Barclay, Watts, Walton and Nicoll properly belonged to the aristocratic or government party, while Messrs. Chambers and Smith, the Alexanders and the Livingstons were as naturally aligned with the popular side. In the next chapter we shall see how they attacked the problems with which the new enterprise fairly bristled.

Before continuing the narrative, however, more than passing mention is due the allusion in the Articles to "our intended College." It is a matter of no ordinary moment that the Society Library and King's College were founded in the same year. That two such undertakings, representing ideas so advanced, could originate at the very same time, reveals an abundance of cultivation and public spirit, despite "the low state of science and the narrow views and jealousies of sectarian zeal," which Smith the historian knowingly says proved obstacles to the early advance of the College.

The close bond between these twin-sister institutions of culture may further be seen in the frequent identity of their officers, from that day to this. Of the first Library board, for instance, no fewer than eight—James De Lancey, John Chambers and Henry Barclay, each *ex officio*, and Joseph Murray, William Walton, John Watts, Benjamin Nicoll and William Livingston—were named among the first governors of the College, showing also that men of ability are usually to be found

in more than one good work. And this hereditary concord between the two institutions has never been more marked than to-day, in their reciprocal privileges of consultation, so cordially subsisting between the Society Library and the Library of Columbia University.

## II

FIRST STEPS, 1754—1772

**T**HE *New-York Mercury* for Monday, May 6, 1754, in announcing the names of the Trustees elected "to superintend the Affairs of our LIBRARY, for the present Year," adds: "The above gentlemen are desired to meet To-morrow, at the House of *Edward Willet*, in the Broad-Way, precisely at 11 o'Clock."

While we as well as the new officers await this interesting event, it should be stated that from now on our chief source of information as to the proceedings of successive boards of Trustees is found in the complete series of their books of minutes, happily preserved to the Library through all its century-and-a-half of existence. The first two volumes, ending respectively in 1772 and 1832, are leather-covered, dingy old folios, the writing varying in style, and in conformity with the canons of orthography, under different scribes, but as legible to-day as when penned.

The entries at first are variously headed, "At a Meeting of the Trustees of the New-York Library," "At a Meeting of the Trustees of the Library," or simply "At a Meeting of the Trustees," until October, 1759, after



which date the stereotyped form begins, "At a Meeting of the Trustees of the New York Society Library," ending with place and hour of assembling. Then after the word "Present" are listed the members in attendance. Seven constituting a quorum, it often chanced that no meeting could be held, but abortive attempts were scrupulously entered, even when scarcely two or three were gathered together.

Although for its early years the institution was not styled "Society Library" in the minutes, it yet is plain that this name was soon decided upon, from an announcement in the *Mercury* of October 21, 1754, addressed to "the Proprietors of the New-York Society Library," as also from subsequent newspaper notices. The origin of this unique title is often a subject of inquiry. Some have maintained, in view of the high social standing of its originators, as of its general membership always, that the institution was so called because it was meant to be, as it has ever been, the Library of New York *Society!* But this opinion cannot be entertained seriously, for the term "society" had not then, nor until comparatively recent times, the limited or derived sense of *caste*. Besides, such a narrow view is inconsistent with the liberal aim of the founders, and tends to bring undeserved reproach upon the institution.

The question is susceptible of explanation as follows: in the beginning there was formed a voluntary association of persons, a company, a society. This term, "the Society," has been used officially in the minutes and in miscellaneous documents and notices to designate the organization always, the expression, "the Library,"—now in common parlance, and therefore used throughout the present work,—having a colloquial and less formal

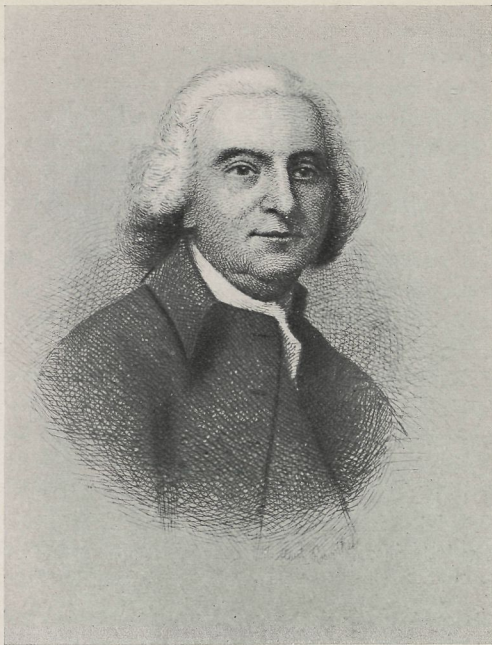
tone. This Society, then, distinctively a New York enterprise, was instituted to found and perpetuate a Library; hence—the New York Society Library. As such it corresponds exactly in purpose to the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Redwood Library<sup>1</sup> at Newport, and the Charleston (S. C.) Library Society, all thriving to-day,<sup>2</sup> and to the Social Libraries so common in New England just before and in the half-century following the Revolution. The generic or class name of all these institutions is Proprietary Libraries; yet they have always been Public Libraries in the original meaning of the term,—that is, available or open to the public, like public houses or conveyances,—in contradistinction to private or parochial or special collections. It is only since about 1850 that the word “public” has come to mean “free,” as applied to libraries.

For fully one hundred years the Society Library was popularly called the “City Library,” long after the Mercantile Library Association and the Apprentices’ Library were established in 1820, and even after the

<sup>1</sup> Since 1835 known officially as The Redwood Library and Athenæum.

<sup>2</sup> Among similar institutions, long since passed into oblivion, may be mentioned the Book Company of Durham, Conn., established in 1733; the Philogrammatican Library of Lebanon, Conn., instituted in 1738 (see “Booklovers of 1738—One of the First Libraries in America,” by Mrs. Martha W. Hooker, in *The Connecticut Magazine*, X (1906), 715 *et seq.*); the Elizabeth-Town (N. J.) Library Company, founded in 1755 (see *The New-York Gazette*; or, *the Weekly Post-Boy*, March 3, 1760); and the equally obscure Albany Society Library, whose book-plate bears date of 1759 (see illustration in *American Book-Plates*, by Charles D. Allen, p. 84). Some vol-

umes of a later colonial association, the Hartford Library Company, formed in 1774 (see *The Connecticut Courant*, Feb. 22, March 1, 15, 22, Apl. 26), are now preserved in the Hartford Public Library. Of those organized soon after the Revolution, the Library Company of Baltimore, incorporated in 1797, was merged into the Maryland Historical Society in 1854; while the Boston Library Society, dating from 1792, has successfully maintained an independent existence. Wider in scope than any of these, the Boston Athenæum, which has lately celebrated its centennial anniversary (1907), presents a different type of proprietary establishment, as will presently appear (see Chapter VII).



Hugh Gainé  
Trustee, 1788–1807





insignificant beginning of the present City Library in the City Hall, a collection chiefly of records for consultation only, under supervision by the board of aldermen.<sup>1</sup> With the gradual development of the modern free Public Library system, however, the old appellation has fallen into disuse, and would not now be recognized as meaning by far the oldest Library in the city—the New York Society Library.

Ten Trustees are recorded as forming the first meeting of its newly elected board, held on May 7th, the only absentees being James Alexander and Robert R. Livingston. They met at the City Arms,<sup>2</sup> on the corner of Broadway and Stone (Thames) street, the principal tavern in town, then but lately opened in the former residence of Lieutenant-Governor De Lancey. That dignitary was no doubt called to the chair, though the minutes are mute on the subject; in fact it is not until 1791 that there is mention of a chairman at all. The chronicle of proceedings is pitifully meager in the early years, simply giving a bare outline of the few measures approved, the record of attendance and, not invariably, the results of annual elections.

<sup>1</sup> After the destruction of the old Corporation Library in 1776, the city harbored no collection of its own until an ordinance of January, 1849, set aside a room "for the accommodation of a Library, to contain the books now belonging to the Common Council, and which may hereafter belong to them." As early as December, 1816, there had been a tentative but ineffectual suggestion of "the expediency of establishing a Library for the use of the Common Council." Final action by the aldermen was occasioned by a gift to the city of a "splendid case of valuable medals [now in the keeping of the New York Historical Society], com-

memorative of interesting events" in the reign of Pope Pius IX, "recently received from him through the agency of Mons. A[lexandre] Vattemare." (See p. 55*n*.) Occupying various rooms, the City Library has been in its present apartments since January, 1898, Librarian Philip Baer having held office since January, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Called also the Province Arms Tavern, the New York Arms and, after the Revolution, the New York State Arms. In 1792 the Tontine Association bought the old stone structure and erected on its site the famous City Hotel, demolished in turn about 1850.

The initial act of this first board was very sensibly a resolution empowering John Watts, William P. Smith and William Alexander, Trustees, and John Livingston—evidently for the shareholders in general, as he was not then a Trustee—to “receive the Subscription Money, from the several Subscribers, in order to be laid out in Books for the Library,” a service they “agreed to perform Gratis.” Mr. Smith was made “Clerk,” also a “gratis” office, and ordered to “prepare a proper Book at the public Expense, for entring the Minutes.” They voted to meet “in the Public Library-Room” thrice yearly, on the first Tuesday afternoon in April, May and September, at three o’clock. A fine of three shillings was to be levied for excuseless absence, “to be paid into the Hands of the Cashier,” but no further mention is made of the penalty or of any enforcement.

As few steps were taken at the opening session, in all likelihood their deliberations at the tavern were weighty and prolonged. At any rate, there was unfinished business when they adjourned, to meet nine days hence at the same place, each Trustee pledged to bring a “catalogue” of suitable books. On reconvening, some of them, “viz<sup>t</sup> Mess<sup>rs</sup> Barclay, W<sup>m</sup> Livingston, Rob<sup>t</sup> R. Livingston, W<sup>m</sup> Alexander & W<sup>m</sup> P. Smith, produced a List of Books.” “But,” the minutes record with much simplicity, “as M<sup>r</sup> Murray imagined, there would not be sufficient time, at this Meeting, to Consider, examine, & collect a proper Catalogue from the Same,” the important matter was again postponed. Nor until the end of the month was a full report rendered of their choice for the first consignment, when, “having now spent some time in examining the several Lists of Books before produced, the Trustees agreed upon the following



Catalogue selected from the s<sup>d</sup> Lists, to be sent for by the first Opportunity."

This combined list, as spread upon the records, includes some 250 titles of leading works of the day in literature and science. It is interesting in itself, and is of especial value as showing the taste of the Trustees and their aim to secure the best and a variety. It is pleasing also to observe how impressed they were with the need of frugality, some works being endorsed "2<sup>d</sup> hand if good." Naturally there are the usual selections from the ancient classics, from Elizabethan writers, and from essayists of the age of Anne. Historical works abound, interspersed among memoirs, diplomatic correspondence, party pamphlets, and philosophical and scientific brochures. Legal minds presumably yearned for "State Tryals complete at large" or "Debates in Parliam<sup>t</sup>"; while the mercantile element was to find relaxation preferably in books of travel, diverting and yet not remote from accustomed interests.

For the clergy there were provided standard commentaries, as also devotional and theological dissertations without number, though not of the extreme heaviness of earlier collections in New York. The remainder consisted of treatises in mathematics and in the field of the natural sciences, together with an assortment from the realms of music, oratory and logic. Truly these were earnest-minded men, aware and proud of their responsibility. We may readily fancy how suggestions had poured in upon them from interested subscribers, and no less from members of their families. One is impressed with the utter absence of light reading in the final decision; for, after approving the list, Mr. Watts was to "transmit by the first Opportunity," to one

# Articles of the Subscription Roll of the New York Library

Whereas a Publick Library would be very useful, as well as ornamental to this City & may be also advantageous to our intended College; We whose Names are herunto subscribed, in order to promote the Design of erecting one in this City, do promise to pay Five Pounds New York Currency, each on the first Day of May next ensuing the Date hereof; and Ten Shillings yearly, each, on every first Day of May forever hereafter, to Twelve Trustees, to be chosen by the Majority of us, or our Assigns, annually; out of the number of Subscribers hereto, or their Assigns, for which Purpose, we agree to meet constantly on the last Tuesday in April, in every Year ensuing the Date hereof, at the Exchange in Broad Street, in this City, between the Hours of Eleven & Twelve; which Trustees, or the Majority of them, are hereby impowred to dispose of the said Money, in purchasing such Books, as they shall think proper from Time to Time, and in procuring a House or Room to deposit them in, To appoint a Library Keeper, and allow him a proper Salary for his care & attendance of the said Library; to regulate the Terms on which the Books belonging to the said Library shall be lent (those who are not Subscribers being to pay such Rates for the Loan of Books as the Trustees shall appoint) and to do every Thing they shall judge necessary to erect, preserve, ornament & improve the said Library; which they are to keep under the following Regulations

It Every subscriber, or his Assigns, shall have a right to take out one Book at a Time, depositing in Cash, at least one third more than the value of it, with the Library Keeper, and to keep it for so long a Time as the Trustees for the Time being shall appoint, to be proportioned as nearly as possible to the Bulk of the Volume; and in case he shall keep it longer to pay for the use of the said Book, after the Expiration of the said Time according to the Rates (to be settled by the Trustees) to be paid by those who shall not be Subscribers hereto. For this Purpose Books shall be valued by the Trustees, and a Catalogue of them with the  
Prices.

Moses Franks in London, the sum of £300 "in Bills of Exch" for these books, "or such other modern Authors as he may judge most suitable for a public Library, & have obtained an established Reputation among the Learned." Then follow the names of "paid" subscribers, to the number of 118, including three "in England," Moses, Naphtali and Aaron Franks, the agents of the enterprise; certainly the soliciting committee had done its work well, for the list comprises leading citizens of the period.

Among them, besides individuals mentioned elsewhere in these pages, appear the names of Mayor Holland, his successor, John Cruger the younger, James Duane, first mayor after the Revolution, Abraham De Peyster, provincial treasurer, Capt. Archibald Kennedy, later known as the Earl of Cassilis, the Rev. Samuel Auchmuty, assistant minister and afterward rector of Old Trinity, the Rev. Alexander Cumming of the Presbyterian Church, Lambert Moore, Esq., for years clerk of the board of governors of King's College, Col. Beverley Robinson, of French War luster, James McEvers, who very sensibly resigned the odious post of stamp collector, James Parker and Hugh Gaine, the well-known printers and editors, and Dr. Richard Shuckburgh, reputed author of "Yankee Doodle," in addition to members of such other notable old New York families as Abeel, Alexander, Alsop, Aspinwall, Barclay, Bayard, Beekman, Crommeline, Cuyler, De Lancey, Des Brosses, Dey, Duncan, Gouverneur, Harison, Jones, Kortright, Lawrence, Lispenard, Livingston, Ludlow, Morris, Nichols, Nicoll, Ogden, Provoost, Richard, Smith, Stuyvesant, Van Cortlandt, Vander Spiegel, Van Horne, Walton and Watts, many of whose



shares are held to-day by descendants, and, in not a few instances, of the same name.

During the summer, the question of securing proper accommodations for the expected collection was doubtless much discussed. At the September meeting, as already stated, they adopted the clever plan of taking charge of the unused old Corporation Library, in return for permission from the Common Council to keep their own books in the "Library Room" in the City Hall, with what entire success we already know.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, in anticipation of the approaching arrival of the books, they drew up their first set of rules, to be "strictly observed by the Librarian,"—yet to be appointed,—as follows:

*Reg. 1.* That no Book whatsoever belonging to this Library, shall be detained in the hands of any Subscriber, longer than the space of *One Month*, under Penalty of paying for the use of the same for any longer time as a *Non-Subscriber*.

*Reg. 2.* Every Non-Subscriber shall pay to the Librarian, for the use of a Book after the following Rates *Viz*<sup>t</sup>

For a Folio Volumn . . . . 1 Month . . . . 4*s*.

For a Quarto D<sup>o</sup> . . . . 1 Month . . . . 2*s*.

For an Octavo, or lesser Vol. . . 1 Month . . . . 1*s*.

And if any Book shall be detained in the hands of a Borrower longer than the time herein limited, he shall pay for every day exceeding the said time *One Shilling* untill the same be returned.

*Reg. 3.* Every Non-Subscriber, upon taking a Book out of the Library, shall deposit in the hands of the Librarian one third more than the Value of the Book taken, and give a sufficient Receipt for the same.

This table is printed in the *Mercury* for October 21st, which same issue conveys the satisfying information,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 77-78.

already quoted, that the books “lately imported are placed for the present, by Leave of the Corporation, in their Library Room in the City-Hall,” where “constant Attendance” was assured on Tuesdays and Fridays from ten to twelve. In November, however, a notice in the *Mercury* declared the collection accessible only on Tuesdays, for one hour, “during the winter season.”

Thus, in the meantime, the eagerly awaited collection had come, after a voyage covering “42 Days from London,” according to the advice in the *Mercury* of October 14th. The arrival of the volumes is announced in this latter issue with the following flourish:

Some Time ago we informed our Readers, that a Subscription was then on foot for raising a Sum of Money in order to erect a public Library in this City; we now have the great Pleasure and Satisfaction of acquainting them, That all the Books sent for, are arrived safe in Capt. *Miller*. We hope that all who have a Taste for polite Literature, and an eager Thirst after Knowledge and Wisdom, will now repair to those Fountains and Repositories from whence they can, by Study, be collected. And we heartily wish, that the glorious Motives of acquiring *that* which alone distinguishes human Nature (we mean Science and Virtue, join'd to the noble Principles of being useful to Mankind, and more especially to our dear Country) will be sufficient to excite the most Lethargic, to peruse the Volumes purchased for this End, by Means of the Advice and Endeavours of Gentlemen whom we and future Generations, will have Reason, we hope, to praise and extoll; and whom, we cannot help saying, are an Honour to their Country: We finally wish, that *New-York*, now she has an Opportunity, will show that she comes not short of the other Provinces, in Men of excellent Genius, who, by cultivating the Talents of Nature, will take off that Reflection cast on us by the neighbouring Colonies, of being an ignorant People; and make the following Maxim of *Seneca's* our own: *Inter Studia Versandum est et inter Auctores Sapien-*

*tiæ, ut Quæsitæ discamus, nondum Inventa quæramus.* SEN.  
Epis. civ.

A printed catalogue of the new collection was straightway published by Hugh Gaine and advertised in his *Mercury* on October 21st, at the price of "Four Coppers." Unhappily no specimen of this first catalogue of the Society Library is known to be in existence, though there is ever the chance of one's coming to light in some ancestral attic. Tradition has it that the initial consignment comprised "about 700 Volumes of new, well chosen, Books,"<sup>1</sup> a somewhat exaggerated statement, however, as appears on consultation of the minutes. Not more than 650 volumes, at the most, can have constituted the original collection, which William Smith prophesied would "in Process of Time . . . probably become vastly rich and voluminous."<sup>2</sup>

After some months' trial, the following "Rates" were substituted in June, 1755, for keeping books out over a month: "for every folio, per diem 1 s. For every Quarto 9<sup>d</sup> For every Octavo 6<sup>d</sup> and for every Duodecimo 3<sup>d</sup>" It was also decreed that, "instead of an allowance of one Month for the Loan of Books of All Sizes," the time be "For every Folio 6 Weeks, For every Quarto 4 Weeks, For every Octavo 3 Weeks & for every Duodecimo 2 Weeks," thus returning to the plan of the original Articles.

At this time John Morin Scott was given charge of the finances, in place of William P. Smith, and also "the Care of the Library," with power to depute the same. No hint is vouchsafed as to who had been acting as custodian before; probably Mr. Smith had engaged

<sup>1</sup> William Smith, *The History of the Province of New-York.* London, 1757. P. 195.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



some person, for he appears to have been the sole officer of the board that first year. Again, in November, 1756, Gabriel Ludlow was put in charge of the collection, and, together with David Clarkson, was directed to receive funds and subscriptions. But in May, 1757, Mr. Smith was once more made "Clerk to the Trustees," an office evidently including guardianship of the capital, then "in M<sup>r</sup> Ludlow's hands."

At this stage it is well to pause for a glance at the changes that had taken place in the ranks of the Trustees. In consequence of three more elections, held regularly according to advertisement at the Exchange, thirteen new names appear on the roll, of whom three were the remaining founders, Philip Livingston, John Morin Scott and William Smith, Jr., all chosen at the second election. That this balloting of 1755 was attended with a repetition of the contest of a year before, with even greater acrimony, is revealed in the same communication from the forceful pen of "B," in the *Mercury* for May 12th, above quoted in part.<sup>1</sup>

Referring to the former effort as "A Design so disgraceful and ridiculous in itself, and so effectually frustrated, . . . [as to] have satisfied any Man, but a blind, hot-headed, and imprudent Zealot," this racy writer proceeds to inform how, "after the fullest Defeat in the most shameful Cause, Bigotry ventured again to rear her Head"; and how a second attempt was made, "equally unsuccessful with the first." Responsibility was attributed to "the Resentment of a Bigot, now heightened into Madness by the late frequent controversial Defeats of HIGH-CHURCH, on the Subject of the COLLEGE," which "drove him, in Defiance of Reason,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 139, 140.

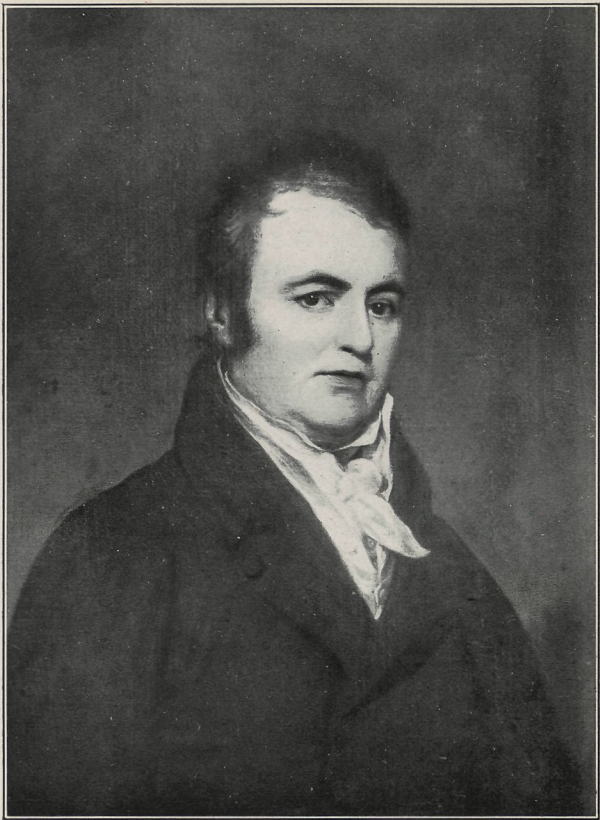
and the Rules of Probability, into a Resolution, once more to attack the Presbyterians, and that in a Manner more base and insidious than the Former."

He then explains that, on the day before election, "this palpable Untruth was impudently coined," and "as impudently propagated, *That the Presbyterians were resolved to turn out every Churchman from the Trusteeship.*" "With what View this vile Slander was published," was "a Matter too obvious, to require a curious Disquisition." After denouncing such a report, as having "a natural Tendency to prepossess every warm *Episcopalian* with the strongest Prejudices against the *Presbyterians*," the philippic continues: "And doubtless had this Scheme taken its full Effect, the Trusteeship would have been filled with a Set of Persons far different in their Sentiments, from those who now enjoy it."

This unpleasant exposé may well close with its very interesting estimate of the position and opportunities of the trusteeship:

It must indeed be admitted, that the Office of a Trustee of our Library is, at present, of very little Importance, either to its Possessor, or the Public. We have an excellent Collection of Books, and no Money in Bank to be squandered. Hence it is impossible to prostitute the Office; and consequently a Matter of Indifference whoever fills it. But if its Unimportance cannot subvert the Right of a Subscriber to stand Candidate for the Post, all undue Means to destroy the Impartiality of an Election, is an Abridgment of his Right; which doubtless as an *Englishman*, he may justly resent.

The fact that the seven new persons then chosen to the board were all of the popular party is proof enough that "the *Presbyterians*, . . . from a Love of *British Freedom*, . . . devised Means in this particular Case,



John Pintard, L.L.D.

Trustee, 1790-1792; 1809-1817. Secretary, 1815-1816





effectually to disappoint the Invaders of their Rights," and that "in doing it they were remarkably successful." They were William Smith, William Smith, Jr., Philip, John and Peter Van Brugh Livingston, John Vander Spiegel and John Morin Scott, an interesting group, as showing the alignment of Dutch Church members with Presbyterians in opposition to the Anglican element. Though John Chambers and James Alexander of the Whig contingent were retired, their places were filled by representatives of the same views, William Walton being the sole Trustee with government leanings returned to office.

The next year saw a turning of the tables, for, of the seven above mentioned, only one, John Livingston, was then reëlected; while his Honor Lieutenant-Governor De Lancey, the Hon.<sup>1</sup> Joseph Murray, the Rev. Dr. Barclay, the Hon. John Watts and Benjamin Nicoll, Esq., were triumphantly reinstated; as was also the Hon. John Chambers of the opposition, which lost in its turn William Livingston, the Hon. William Alexander, Robert R. Livingston and William P. Smith, besides six of the Whigs elected only the year before. Furthermore, the aristocratic following gained four new men in the Hon. Oliver De Lancey, the Hon. Henry Cruger, David Clarkson and Gabriel Ludlow.

In 1757 there came another reversal, by which there was a more equitable division of the opposing political forces, with only two new names, Peter Keteltas and Goldsbrow Banyar. Thereafter, a wholesome calm seems to have settled down upon that annual function, for, in the seventeen remaining years before the disrup-

<sup>1</sup> The title "Hon." in colonial days implied a member of the governor's council.

tion occurred, but ten additional individuals were called to the work, changes seemingly taking place only with inroads of time.

When one surveys the characters and careers of these several Trustees, one finds the fire of partisan zeal sinking low in comparison with their general worth and usefulness in their day and community. Of this type Peter Van Brugh Livingston, an older brother of Philip and William, is a conspicuous example. A successful merchant, with an unblemished record for probity, he not only aided the city and its various concerns in numberless ways, but also has a strong claim on his country's gratitude, for patriotic assistance with funds and credit. Stanchly Presbyterian in church affiliations, he served as an elder for more than twenty years, and for eight years as a trustee, of the old First Church. He was also treasurer of the New York Hospital for seven years. His trusteeship in the Library lasted until the very eve of the Revolution, but he left the city in 1787, before the institution was set on its feet again. John Livingston, yet another member of this remarkable brotherhood, appears to have been its only Tory representative, perhaps because of his large mercantile interests. He did not turn against his family, however; while his services to church and state, in deliberations of the Common Council and of the Dutch Church consistory, entitle him to respectful appreciation.

The Hon. William Smith, Sr., was reputed the most eloquent speaker in the province. With his friend, James Alexander, he had pleaded the causes of free speech and free press, to their own personal temporary humiliation, but to the lasting advantage of democracy. These same men were also associated in founding the



first public school in New York in 1732. Honors heaped upon him never turned his head, as he calmly put aside what did not fit in with his carefully planned life. At the age of twenty-seven, he had declined the presidency of Yale College; again, in 1760 he refused the vacant chief justiceship. But he served his fellow-citizens with distinction in the several posts of councilor, attorney-general, advocate-general and associate justice of the highest provincial tribunal; and no less useful was he as one of the earliest trustees, and later as an elder, of the Presbyterian Church in New York.

It may have been noticed that the lawyers were in large majority on the first board—not at all an astonishing phenomenon. Little by little, however, the merchants gained admittance, until it is worthy of comment that, of the twenty-five Trustees in office prior to 1760, there were ten merchants to thirteen “Esquires.” They include John Vanderspiegel, who acted as the first regular Treasurer of the Library for thirteen years; Henry Cruger, the son and the brother of a mayor of this city, himself an assemblyman and later holding a seat in the council; David Clarkson, of the old dry goods firm, a Trustee for twenty years, and as long a vestryman and warden of Trinity parish; Gabriel Ludlow, clerk of the assembly for an extended term and for nearly a generation a vestryman of Old Trinity; and Peter Keteltas, identified as inseparably with the history of the Dutch Church, a man who “was not only esteemed, as he truly was, an upright and honest man, but enjoyed the singular felicity of passing through life unsuspected of an unworthy action.”<sup>1</sup>

A right gallant figure was the Hon. Col. Oliver De

<sup>1</sup> Obituary notice in *The New-York Journal*, August 29, 1792.

Lancey, younger brother of the lieutenant-governor and a large landholder of the day. Preëminently a military character, he yet was identified with civic interests, serving for a short time as alderman. Impetuous and intriguing in disposition, he led in all political manoeuvring, though lacking the superb equipoise of his brother. A member of the council for sixteen years, he maintained his allegiance to the crown, dashing off at the head of his own battalion under a brigadier-general's commission from his Majesty, never to return. Alas for his elegant country-seat at Bloomingdale, to go up in pitiless flames, and alas for this illustrious but loyalist family, its great estates forever confiscate, and its once proud station but a local memory!

Not nearly so tragic a fate befell Goldsbrow Banyar, deputy-secretary of the province for many years, and of whom Lieutenant-Governor Colden wrote to England, in recommending his appointment to the council, that there was "no Man . . . more usefull on every account," nor "so long conversant in public affairs." At the outbreak of the Revolution he retired quietly to Rhinebeck and later to Albany, where he peacefully ended his days at a great age. He served as first president of the famous British-American St. George's Society; while his trusteeship in the Library covered thirteen years.

Resuming our narrative, an item of note is the appointment of a regular Librarian. On May 16, 1757, the board met at "Scotch Johnny's,"<sup>1</sup> a place of refreshment charmingly situated near the waterside at Whitehall, when and where, "M<sup>r</sup> Benj: Hildreth having

<sup>1</sup> John Thompson, tavern keeper at the Sign of the Crown and Thistle at Whitehall slip, where in 1755 a

ferry had been started to Staten Island, then having a population of about 2300.

agreed to execute the Office of a Library Keeper," the sum of £6 was "allowed him annually out of the yearly Subscriptions, for his Trouble & Care while in that Office." He was instructed to give "constant personal Attendance at the Library room two Hours in every week viz<sup>t</sup> from 2 to 4 o'Clock on every Wednesday Afternoon thro'out y<sup>e</sup> Year, unless prevented by Sickness or other unavoidable avocation, when he shall depute some other capable person to attend in his stead, for whose care of the Books he shall be accountable." At the same time, Gabriel Ludlow was ordered to "desire his Son [George Duncan Ludlow], who has for a considerable time generously acted as our Librarian," to get a receipt for the books from Mr. Hildreth.

Quite in contradiction to this action is a notice in the *Mercury* of May 23d, stating that *Joseph* Hildreth was "appointed keeper of the New-York Library," under the same schedule. According to the Treasurer's accounts, the first year's salary was paid to the latter individual, who, however, signed "J. Jos. Hildreth," as though simply acting for another. Thereafter, the duties of the position were discharged by Benjamin until September, 1765.

This first Librarian of the Society Library had been registered a freeman in January, 1752, by occupation a "Distiller." He was the second son of Benjamin Hildreth, "taylor,"<sup>1</sup> a juryman at the famous Zenger trial in 1735. The name of Benjamin, Jr., appears in published sources as having served the community in various capacities. In 1746, as "Captain," he was commissioned to transport some prisoners of war to the French col-

<sup>1</sup> "Abstract of Wills," *Liber* 13, p. 127. *N. Y. Hist. Society Collec-*

*tions for 1894*, p. 233. His will was proved March 22, 1738.



onies; seven years later, the South ward chose him a constable; and on one occasion in 1755 he was paid for delivering fuel to troops on Nutten (Governor's) Island. Prospering in business "at the New Brick Distill-House, near Peck's-Slip," he was living in St. George's Square in 1774, when, as one of "the Principal Male Inhabitants," he signed a petition to Lieutenant-Governor Colden for further suspension of a law prohibiting the erection of wooden buildings in certain parts of town.<sup>1</sup> His older brother, Joseph, an accountant, kept the records of Trinity parish for nearly forty years, and for as long a time was master of its charity school.

In November, 1756, and again in March, 1758, new invoices of books were announced, at a cost of £52 and £70, respectively. Though much smaller than the first consignment, they present as wide a range of interest, in titles, at least. On the arrival of the former of these two, Trustees Cruger and Ludlow were requested to "wait on" Captain Jasper Farmar and Mr. Jacob Franks, "& return them thanks of y<sup>e</sup> trustees, for their Generousity in Giving this Society the freight of the Books, sent for by them." Further, "the Use of the Library, upon y<sup>e</sup> term's of a Subscriber," was voted to the captain,—an early instance of honorary membership.

At the March meeting of 1758, William Livingston "presented to y<sup>e</sup> Trustees a Devise to be engraven & fixed in the Books," which they "thankfully" accepted, and ordered Mr. Vanderspiegel, just appointed to the "gratis" office of Clerk-and-Treasurer, to "get the said Devise engraved & paisted in the Books as soon as he

<sup>1</sup> Valentine's *Manual of the Corporation for 1850*, p. 427 *et seq.*

conveniently can." Such was the origin of the Society Library's first bookplate, made within a few months by Elisha Gallaudet, presumably from the suggested design of Mr. Livingston.<sup>1</sup>

Further directions were at the same time given to the new incumbent of the double office, "to get all the Books Number'd in Gilt Letters," and to "immediately order a new Catalogue . . . printed, and . . . furnish every Subscriber with a Copy." Lastly, he was to send a copy to John Ward, the London agent, "and desire him, when ever he observes any Sett of Books want to be compleated, to take particular care to supply the additional Vol<sup>s</sup> by the first Ship after their publication."

That this last commission was executed in due season by the Treasurer-Clerk is proved by some memoranda written in the sole copy of the issue that has come down the years.<sup>2</sup> This diminutive, paper-covered pamphlet of twenty-four pages was presented to the Library, January 25, 1865, by the Hon. Horatio Seymour of New

<sup>1</sup> A receipt, signed "E Gallaudet" and dated July 26, 1758, shows that the artist was paid £3 10s 6d "for Engraving a Copper Plate for the New York Society Library." On Nov. 29, 1758, Gerardus Duyckinck, stationer, receipted a bill of £3 13s, "for Striking off One Thousand impressions from Copper Plate"; and on the same date Joseph Hildreth acknowledged receipt of 18s, "for pasting devices in ye Books." Following is a description of the plate, appearing in *American Book-Plates* (Charles Dexter Allen. New York, 1894), p. 255: "This plate is armorial in form, but presents no real arms. The central frame, of Chippendale design, contains four quarterings, which represent the arts of Astronomy, Navigation, Geography, Mathematics, and Literature; Religion also is represented. Mercury and Minerva

support the frame, standing upon the ribbon which bears the name; above the frame sits Apollo with his broad back to the full-shining sun; clouds which resemble toy balloons rise about him. Beneath the frame appear the outskirts of a city, with spires and towers visible; directly under this is the word 'Αθῆναι (presumably to suggest that New York City was the modern Athens); a closed chest with a lighted candle upon it has these words on it, *sed in candelabro*, and an open book bears across its face the motto, *Nosce teipsum*. Signed, *E. Gallaudet. Sc.* Illustrated in 'Ex Libris Journal,' Vol. III, p. 141."

<sup>2</sup> *A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the New-York Society Library*. New-York: Printed and Sold by H. Gaine, at the Bible and Crown, in Hanover-Square.

York, a special vote of thanks being at once accorded him by the delighted Trustees. Though its title-page bears no date, a list of new subscribers at the back, penned by either Mr. Vanderspiegel or the Librarian, was begun "13 Sept: 1758." The total number of vol-



First bookplate of the Society Library, engraved by Gallaudet in 1758 (facsimile size). See pp. 166-167.



umes here listed is 859, showing that the collection was slowly growing. Of the membership no definite statement can be made, for the roll as printed is identical with that inscribed in the minutes in 1754, evidently copied from the first published list without additions or corrections, inasmuch as Joseph Murray, for one, had died the year before.

Preceding the catalogue proper comes an "Advertisement," containing "The Conditions for the Loan of Books"; the hours as last stated, from two to four on Wednesdays; and the date of the annual election at the Exchange, "when Gentlemen should come prepar'd to pay their Yearly Subscription, which is ten Shillings." A special "N. B." announces that "Books marked thus \* in the following Catalogue, are an additional Importation per the Charles, Captain Jacklyn."<sup>1</sup> The titles, arranged in alphabetical order only by the initial letter, are further divided into groups according to fold, first the folios, from A to Z, and so on.

Doubtless in response to a growing demand, it was voted in February, 1759, "that the Library be opened Twice a Week"; but no corresponding consideration was shown the Librarian in a resolve that, "unless the Keeper will Attend that Service for the Same Salary heretofore paid, M<sup>r</sup> John Vanderspiegel have Leaue to appoint another that will." Without a murmur, so far as the records tell, Mr. Hildreth continued at his post under double hours, notice of his "Attendance every Monday and Thursday, from half an Hour after Eleven, to one o'Clock," appearing in the local papers for May.

<sup>1</sup> There are 55 such asterisks; while a page of accounts in the minutes shows this confirmatory item: "Rec'd of John V. D. Spiegel Two pounds

for the Freight of a Case of Printed Books from London to New York in the Ship Charles (and Nine pence for Entry). Edm<sup>d</sup> Jacklyne."

From time to time, as funds accumulated, additional works were ordered from abroad, the lists being compiled from "catalogues" of suggested books required of each Trustee. One such list met with a fate happily withheld from any actual consignments amid the fortunes of war; for in May, 1761, the Treasurer was asked to "Send to M<sup>rs</sup> Ward, Or to Such Other Person as He Shall think fit, in London, for the Books mentioned in the Catalogue, formerly Sent John Ward, and taken by the Enemy."

In consequence of these accessions, of the same general character as the original collection, a third printed catalogue was necessitated and duly appeared in August, 1761. A single specimen of this publication of 200 copies is also in the possession of the Society Library; it too is from the press of Hugh Gainé,<sup>1</sup> and similar in all respects to the last, being likewise undated. According to its "Advertisement," the Library hours are continued as before. The list of subscribers is again identical with those in former catalogues, a strange recurrence; it must have been repeated simply to put on record the names of the original shareholders, though one would expect a full list of up-to-date members in full standing. The total number of volumes, their titles arranged alphabetically and with more care this time, is 1018, a gain of 159 in three years. One title in particular is of interest, in connection with the story of that survivor of the Trinity Parish Library, now in the Society Library,—a set of "Clarendon's History of the Rebellion."

A very noticeable omission in this last catalogue is the

<sup>1</sup>*A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the New-York Society Library.* | New-York: | Printed by H.

Gainé, at the Bible and Crown, in Ha-nover-Square.

schedule of terms for non-subscribers. In May of that year the board had directed the Librarian "not to Suffer any Person not a Subscriber to have any Book Out of the Library for the Future," because many books "hired" by them had been "greatly injured and Abused." At the same time, a committee was charged to "See whether Any and what Books are lost Or Missing," and to "Advertise Such Books as Shall be found Missing." Lastly, the Treasurer was authorized to employ a collector, the first mention of such an assistant, at the modest remuneration of "Ninepence in the Pound." His accounts show that this work was regularly performed by Librarian Hildreth.

Trustee meetings continued to be held in itinerant fashion at one and another of the public houses. It is gratifying to one's curiosity to find that the board patronized our celebrated Fraunces' Tavern, forever renowned as the scene of Washington's "Farewell" to his officers. On March 9, 1764, the Trustees assembled "at the House of M<sup>r</sup> Samuel Francis,"<sup>1</sup> as it is politely expressed in the minutes. The list of books, then "added and sent for," may be quoted in full to show their character, as well as the constant attention paid to enlarging the collection. They are thus entered in the records:

Swift's Works latest & best Edition with Cutts; Lady Mary Worthly Montague's Letters or Travels; Elements of Criticism by Lord Keams; Broughton's History of All Religions; All the Volumes of Warburton's divine Legation of Moses, succeeding the fourth Volume if any; Commons Debates, 1667-1694; Mon-

<sup>1</sup> According to newspaper advertisements, "Samuel Frances" was at that time innkeeper "at the Sign of the Queen's Head, near the Exchange" on Broad street, corner of Queen (Pearl). Within the year

1907 the historic structure was restored by the Society of the Sons of the Revolution, and to-day old Fraunces' Tavern looks as it did when "Black Sam," its West Indian proprietor, flourished.



taign's Essays; St Evremont; Dodly's Collection of Poems; Reflections on the Rise and fall of Ancient Republicks adapted to the present state of G Britain by E. Worthly Montague Esq<sup>r</sup>; The Present State of Europe by John Campbell Esq<sup>r</sup>; The Duke of Sully's Memoirs; Kempfer's History of Japan; Levy's Roman History in English, the best Edition; An Account of the European Settlements in America &c; The Works of Daniel Defoe; Clarendon's History of His own Life; The Adventurer; The Connoisure; Humes Political Discoveries; Voyages from Asia to America for Compleating the Discoveries of the North West Coast of America translated from the High Dutch of S. Muller by Thomas Jeffery's with the Maps; All Sheridan's Works; Fuller's Gymnastic Exercises; Montesqui's Persian Letters.—All Lettered on the Backs.

Although at this time, it will be recalled, the old Corporation Library was taking a repose of two years in storage,<sup>1</sup> pending extensive repairs to the City Hall, there is nothing in the Library minutes to prove that its collection was at all disturbed. The Librarian continued to draw his salary regularly, while Trustee meetings and annual elections were held as usual, at taverns or at the Exchange. That the institution was contributing its share toward these same improvements is inferable from this item in the accounts: "To Cash p<sup>d</sup> Andrew Gautier for Work Done at the Library Room . . . 15<sup>s</sup>," dated March 26, 1764. Again, just a year later, Treasurer Vanderspiegel records: "To Cash p<sup>d</sup> Cleaning the Library Room & Carting Books from my House to the Library Room . . . 10<sup>s</sup> 9<sup>d</sup>." At first sight this last entry might seem to imply that the Society Library's books had also been temporarily removed; but the smallness of the item, coupled with the fact that a new consignment of 130 volumes had just arrived from London, makes that theory the less tenable.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 79.

At all events, by the middle of September, 1765, Thomas Jackson, "Master of the Academy in the Exchange," had begun his duties as Librarian of both Libraries in the City Hall. By the Common Council he was paid £4 a year "for his Trouble," and he received from the Trustees of the Society Library the further sum of £6 per annum. The two collections were to be open to the public as before, on Mondays and Thursdays from 11:30 to one o'clock. Inasmuch as the advertisement in the *Gazette* for September 19, 1765, states no terms for loans, it is probable that the Trustees had made no change since their by-law of June, 1755, repeated in the Catalogues of 1758 and 1761. The rates charged by the Corporation Library have already been quoted.<sup>1</sup>

This same *Gazette* notice reports that the Society Library then had "a large well chosen collection of the most useful modern books, with a considerable late addition, of which a catalogue will be speedily published, that the subscribers may stitch in with their former catalogues." Sad to relate, the surviving copies of those earlier publications contain not this supplement, printed in the fall of 1766 by Hugh Gaine. It may, however, have become parted from their company, for their present condition might properly be termed *unstitched*! The interesting statement then follows that "A share in this Library is now worth 10 l. 10 s.," which quotation indicates increased market valuation. Further on appears this list of books, advertised as "missing":

Ludlow's memoirs, fol. Wood's institutes of common law, fol. Hogarth's analysis, 4to, Cowley's works, vol. 1st. Shakespear, vol. 2d. Rolt of the late war, vol. 4th. Clogher's journal. Life of Richlieu, 2 vols. De la Sale's voyages. Henepin's trav-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 79.

els. Life of Sir Matthew Hale, 12mo. Life of the duke of Marlborough. Thompson's travels. Voyage to Peru. Christian hero. Conclusion of bishop Burnet's history. Adventurer, vol. 4th. Select trials at the Old Bailey, vol. 3d. Rowe's works, vol. 2d.

Contrary to custom, but perhaps out of deference to the engagements of Mayor Hicks, one of their number, the Trustees met on December 17, 1766, "in the Library-Room at the City Hall." After ordering Treasurer Vanderspiegel to pay all salary arrears to Messrs. Benjamin Hildreth and Thomas Jackson, it was voted that the Librarian thenceforth be paid quarterly. Thereupon, that officer was requested "to observe punctually" a certain "standing Rule" of the Library as to the limitation of its privileges to delinquents. Next they acknowledged from Messrs. Robert Barclay and Daniel Mildred, "in Name of the Society of Friends at London . . . Eight Volumes of the principal Writings for that People." And lastly Messrs. Vanderspiegel, W. Livingston and Rutherford were deputed to prepare "a List of the new Books now proposed to be sent for, and to recommend to their Correspondent at London to send the Books as mentioned in the Order of the List as far as the Money in the Hands of the Treasurer will pay for." This measure had been announced in the *Mercury* of December 15th as the chief object of assembling, and "all the Proprietors" were urged "in the mean Time to send a Catalogue of such Books as they think proper for that Purpose to Mr. Jackson, the Librarian, to be then submitted to the Judgement of the Trustees."

For many years no mention was made of domestic purchases of books. But in February, 1770, an order was given to James Rivington, printer, publisher of



*Rivington's New-York Gazetteer*, and a bookseller as well, at his "open and uninfluenced Press, fronting Hanover-Square"; and a committee was asked to "Make a fair List of such books as are Agreed on to be purchas<sup>d</sup> & in case they cannot be purchased here Cheeper or as Cheep as they Can be sent for, that then M<sup>r</sup>. Vanderspiegel do send for them,"—the minute being self-explanatory as to why local dealers had not been patronized hitherto. Thenceforth, until the Revolution summarily closed all accounts, Mr. Rivington, together with "some Bookseller in London," played no minor part in supplying needs of the institution. Over a year after this incident, a list of books, "lately received" through Rivington's agency, appeared in *Gaine's Gazette and Mercury* of April 15, 1771, as follows:

Handmaid to Arts, Anderson on Commerce, Hook's Roman History, Fitzosborne's Letters, Smith's moral Sentiments, Ferguson on civil Society, Dalrymple on Feudal Property, Annual Register, Delaney's Revelation examined with Candour, Gerard on Taste, Felton on the Classics, Reid on the Mind, Ferguson's Astronomy, Ferguson's Lectures, Burk on the Sublime, Biographical Dictionary, Vatel's Law of Nations.

During the brief space of time remaining before the outbreak of war, the Trustees continued to assemble for deliberation and refreshment at Widow Brock's wayside inn, which stood "near the old City Hall in Wall-street," the newspapers tell. But little business appears to have been transacted, beyond looking out for missing books, contracting for new ones, and regulating the duration of loans. In February, 1770, it was enacted that a folio might be "detained" six weeks; a quarto, four; an octavo, three; and a duodecimo, two weeks,

further retention entailing a "forfitt" of four, three, and two pence and "one penney" a day, respectively.

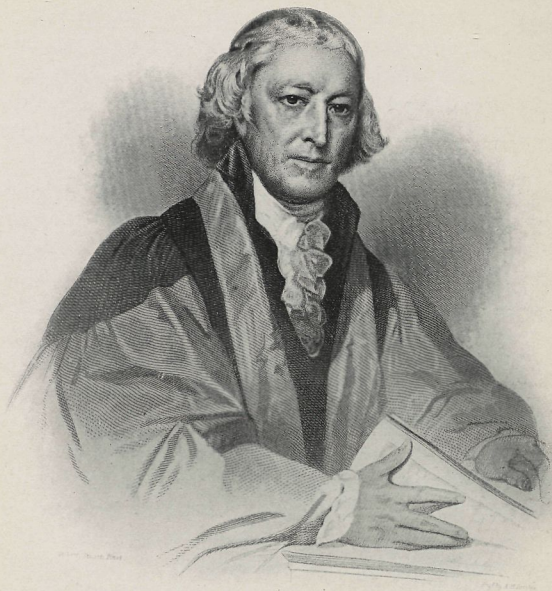
Within these years several changes took place in the incumbency of the Librarian's office. Thomas Jackson, appointed to the two-fold charge of the Society Library and the old Corporation Library in September, 1765, was a man of cultivation and ability. In 1762 he had conducted on Wall street a private classical school,<sup>1</sup> which, in consequence of success, he was encouraged to remove, in May, 1765, to more pretentious quarters in the Exchange, "the best house in town for a publick school,"<sup>2</sup> "at the Rent of Sixty Pounds."<sup>3</sup> Here he entered into a brief partnership with Peter Wilson, "a young gentleman, who with the greatest approbation, finished a regular course of education in the University of Aberdeen, and also assisted for two years, to great satisfaction, in teaching."<sup>2</sup> This is an early allusion to one of the leading educators of his time, afterward to serve for many years as a Trustee of the Society Library. The pair advertised an "Academy" of instruction in "all branches of useful education," for "gentlemen and ladies of eight years old and upwards." Several months later, coincidentally with his new Library duties, this active man started another enterprise, heralded in the *Mercury* of September 30th as follows:

**A**N evening school, for the greater convenience of young people, will be opened this evening Sept. 30, in Mr. Jackson's academy, at the Exchange; where will be taught, reading, writing, cyphering, book-keeping, navigation, geography and

<sup>1</sup> *History of the School of the Collegiate Reformed Dutch Church.* New York, 1883. P. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *The New-York Gazette; or the Weekly Post-Boy*, May 2, 1765.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the Common Council*, vol. VI, p. 409.



Hon. William Samuel Johnson, J.C.D., LL.D.

Trustee, 1792-1801





algebra. Punctual attendance will be given, and proper pains taken for the benefit of the scholars.

While residing in New York, Mr. Jackson was a devoted member of the English Presbyterian Church, which he served as elder and as clerk of the session. With others, including William Smith, Garrat Noel and Peter Van Brugh Livingston, elders, and William Smith, Jr., and John Morin Scott, trustees, he formulated a petition to the city fathers in 1766 for "the Angular Piece of Ground,"<sup>1</sup> on which the "Old Brick" Church was so long to stand. The time and occasion of his leaving New York are thus recorded in the ancient "Session Book," under date of August 26, 1768: "Mr Thomas Jackson a worthy Member of this Session, having applied himself to the Ministry & removed out of the City, is no longer considered a Member of this Judicature." So far as his Library work was concerned, he seems to have employed a deputy at the last, as the Treasurer's records show that the usual £6 for the year ending May 1, 1768, was paid to one Alexander Miller, "for Mr Tho<sup>s</sup> Jackson." During the next six years the post of Librarian was held by James Wilmot.

Throughout these years the subscribers had met regularly on the last Tuesday in April,<sup>2</sup>—as has been the practice ever since,—though at varying times of day, the hour for the first decade and more being eleven in the forenoon. No further contests appear to have arisen, and, as has been said, the old board was usually reëlected.

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the Common Council*, vol. VII, pp. 5-6, 8-12.

<sup>2</sup> On one occasion, in 1771, a notice was issued in *Gain's Gazette and Mercury* of April 15th, calling the annual meeting for the 16th, at the

usual hour, at the Exchange, when "some matters of importance"—probably the discussion of a charter—were to be "proposed." A week later, however, members were properly advised of the "Mistake."

The last act of moment to chronicle for this first period in the history of the Society Library is the appointment, in February, 1771, of Samuel Jones, elected a Trustee the preceding April, as Treasurer to succeed John Vanderspiegel, deceased.<sup>1</sup> In passing, it will be observed that the clause in the original Articles, forbidding a Trustee to hold the office of Treasurer, had been systematically ignored from the beginning. It had doubtless been found far easier in the management to have that officer a member of the board; while any apprehensions that framers of the Articles may have entertained regarding proper disposal of the funds had evidently not been shared by members at large, when once the machinery of administration had been set in motion.

<sup>1</sup> The *Gazette* of Feb. 4, 1771, contained a summons to "Subscribers and Trustees of the Society Library" to meet "at the House of Mrs. Brock" on the 12th, "at six o'Clock in the Evening to choose a Trustee

and elect a Treasurer, in the Room of Mr. Vanderspiegle, deceased." Goldsbrow Banyar was elected to the board, which thereupon chose Mr. Jones, Treasurer.



### III

FROM THE ROYAL CHARTER, 1772, TO THE REVOLUTION, 1776

THERE is no question that the founders of the Society Library looked forward with confidence to a time, not remote, when they should secure their undertaking on the strong and enduring basis of incorporation. Such had been the original aim, as recorded by one of their little company, William Smith, Jr., that "it would be very proper for the Company to have a Charter for its Security and Encouragement"<sup>1</sup>; yet more than eighteen years were to elapse before attaining that object. It is not easy, in the lack of evidence, to offer a convincing explanation of this apparent and protracted indifference.

It may be that the strenuous injection of politics into the enterprise at the start, let alone the evident worsting of his own party, may have so disaffected Lieutenant-Governor De Lancey that he lost interest in the Library and could not be induced to sanction its incorporation. Then, too, the international life-and-death struggle for mastery on the American continent was absorbing the attention and energies of provincial authorities to the exclusion of aught else, during the first half of this very period.

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Province of New York*. London, 1757. P. 195.

Nevertheless, some gleam of hope must have shone out, possibly from De Lancey himself, for in October, 1759, Benjamin Nicoll, William Smith, Jr., and William Alexander were deputed to prepare "the Draft of a Charter for Incorporating the Society agreeable to the Articles & Lay it before the Trustees with all Convenient Speed." But this slight glimmer was extinguished not many months later by the sudden death of the lieutenant-governor.

Dr. Cadwallader Colden, who presently succeeded as acting executive, must have entertained a prejudice against the Library. He certainly never evinced enough interest even to become a member, an astonishing fact when his cultivated and scholarly tastes are taken into account. Always at odds with his predecessor, he was ever only too conscious of the antipathy also existing between himself and "those Presbyterian lawyers," as he termed Livingston, Smith and Scott. Consequently there was slim chance to consummate their purpose throughout his term of office. No encouragement, furthermore, seems to have been offered by successive royal governors, Monckton, Moore and Dunmore, during their brief tenure.

Early in the incumbency of Governor Tryon, however, a renewed and successful attempt was finally made, in an order of December 4, 1771, "that M<sup>r</sup> Jones prepare a Draft of a Charter for incorporating the members of the Library and lay it before the Trustees at their next meeting." Besides the anticipation of executive favor, there was yet another motive impelling to a speedy accomplishment of the long-deferred project. Oft-times competition will stimulate to activity even more cogently than sympathetic interest alone. Possibly such

was true in this case, for, on the very day before the meeting just chronicled, there had been issued the prospectus of the Union Library Society of New York.<sup>1</sup> For more than seventeen years the Society Library had been the only establishment of its kind in the community, cordially sanctioned by the city government as well as by the general public; but now a rival suddenly springs up to contest its influence, if not its very existence.

From the standing of the sponsors of the new institution, and in view of the very reasonable charges advertised, the older organization had clearly a serious situation to face. Although the minutes record no mention of this event, or of any apprehensions on its score, the Trustees were fully alive to its import. Too much careful planning and hard work had been expended in behalf of their trust to lose ground now, when so near attainment of the long-distant goal. Spurred to action, *Incorporation* became their slogan.

At the January meeting in 1772, Samuel Jones accordingly produced the desired draft of a charter, which was read and agreed upon by the board after some slight emendation. A petition, "praying for a Grant of the Charter," was then drawn up and signed; and Mr. Jones was requested to present it to the governor, after securing the signatures of four absent members. The first volume of the old records thereupon concludes with proclaiming the election, on the last Tuesday in April, 1772, of "the same Trustees as the last Year." A gap of thirteen months stretches between the first two books of minutes, in which interval the charter had passed the provincial seals, with the signature of Governor William Tryon on November 9, 1772.

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, pp. 112-118, 120.



Well might the second volume of proceedings open with a flourish, amid sounding of trumpets and haut-boys! Here indeed, if nowhere else in the formal record of events, a note of self-congratulation would assuredly be appropriate. But the laconic equipoise of the entries is unailing. Not a trace of enthusiasm, or even of satisfaction, is discernible in the simple statement that, "at the Tavern kept by Sarah Brock . . . on Thursday the seventh Day of January 1773," in the presence of a bare quorum, "the Charter for the said Library was produced and read."

Immediately following comes a draft of the precious document in full, covering some fifteen pages of the old folio; in the absence of the original instrument, additional interest attaches to this contemporary copy, elegantly written throughout. Columbia University fitly cherishes to-day the actual charter granted to King's College in 1754 by Lieutenant-Governor De Lancey, as the representative of King George II. No less may the Society of the New York Hospital rejoice in possessing under glass its deed of incorporation, bestowed by the Earl of Dunmore with the sanction of King George III in 1771. Still greater cause for complacency have the corporations of the Reformed Dutch Church and Old Trinity in having preserved similarly authoritative evidences of legal establishment, signed by Governor Fletcher in the days of King William III in 1696 and 1697, respectively. But the Society Library—like the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, chartered in March, 1770, under Lieutenant-Governor Colden—has suffered irreparable loss in this particular respect. There is no knowledge of the actual destruction of the missing parchment, but the great

*Memorandum.* The first of <sup>books</sup> Minutes now in the Library cover:  
minutes of May 1754; and the last meeting min-  
uted <sup>second</sup> *Business*, is dated Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 1772.

At a Meeting of the Trustees of the New-  
York Society Library at the Tavern kept  
by Sarah Brock in the City of New York on  
Thursday the seventh Day of January 1773.  
Present.

John Watts  
William Smith  
Goldsbrow Banyar  
Peter Van Brugh Livingston  
Peter Ketteltas  
Samuel Bond.  
Samuel Jones

} Trustees

The Charter for the said Library was produced  
and read and is in the Words following to wit.

George

George the third by  
the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland  
King Defender of the Faith and so forth; To all to  
whom these Presents shall come Greeting: Whereas our  
loving Subjects John Watts, William Smith, Robert  
A. Livingston, Whitehead Hicks, William A.  
Livingston, Goldsbrow Banyar and Samuel  
Jones of our City of New York Esquires, Peter  
Van Brugh Livingston and Peter Ketteltas  
of our said City of New York Merchants, Walter  
Rutherford and David Clarkson of our said  
City of New York Gentlemen and Samuel A.  
Bond of our said City of New York Physician  
by their humble Petition presented unto our Trusty and  
well-beloved William Tryon Esquire our  
Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over our  
Province of New York and the Territories depending thereon  
in America Chancellor and Vice Admiral of the same  
and read in our Council for our said Province on the Eighth  
Day of September last past did set forth That sundry  
Persons conceiving a public Library would be Useful as well  
as

hope that it may sometime be restored grows ever less with the years.<sup>1</sup>

Like other royal charters, this document is unparagraphed, from the salutation of the king, in all his titled majesty, to the signature of Governor Tryon at the end. With stately pomp there comes first the customary greeting from "George the Third, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and so forth." The preamble recites the names of that year's Trustees, classifying them as *Esquires*, *Merchants*, *Gentlemen*, and *Physician*. It also includes extracts from their petition, which in turn reads like a recapitulation of the old Articles of 1754. Still quoting the petition, the instrument continues:

By which Means the said Library was become very considerable, but would increase much faster, and might be made of greater publick Utility if a Corporation should be formed for that Purpose. . . . Now we taking into our Royal Consideration the beneficial Tendency of such an Institution within our said City, are graciously pleased to grant the said humble Request of our said loving Subjects. KNOW YE THEREFORE, That we of our especial Grace, certain Knowledge and mere Motion, have willed, given, granted, ordained, constituted and appointed, and by these Presents, Do will, give, grant, ordain, constitute and appoint, That the said . . . [naming the twelve Trustees and then other members, to include seventeen *Esquires*, one *Doctor of Divinity*, twenty *Merchants*, three *Gentlemen*, two *Distillers*, one *Printer*, one *Apothecary*, one *Surgeon*, and one *Widow*,—fifty-nine in all]: Being such of the Subscribers to the said Library,

<sup>1</sup>There is no record of the time when the charter disappeared. It is said to have been in the Library's possession as late at 1850. The original draft of the document, containing 16 pp. folio, is in vol. 5 (1772-1775) of "Original Drafts of Land Patents," State Library, Albany. It

of course bears no signatures. The Executive Council minutes (MS.) record receipt of a petition for incorporation under date of Sept. 8, 1772; but the original paper is missing. See *Calendar of Council Minutes, 1668-1783*. Albany, 1902. P. 567.



or their Assigns, as have not only paid the said Sum of *Five Pounds*, but also the said *Ten Shillings* yearly, ever since; and such other Persons as shall be hereafter admitted Members of the Corporation hereby erected, be, and for ever hereafter shall be by Virtue of these Presents, One Body Corporate and Politic in Deed, Fact and Name, by the Name, Stile, and Title of THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.

Next are conferred unreservedly all the rights incident to a corporation, including perpetual succession, capacity to sue and to be sued, the holding of property, possession of a seal, and the liberty to erect a Library building and other structures. There should continue to be, it goes on to state, twelve Trustees to conduct the affairs of the institution; and that, as hitherto, on the last Tuesday in April, "yearly and every Year for ever thereafter," the members should meet at the Exchange in Broad street, "or at some other convenient Place in our said City of New York," to elect Trustees.

Then come provisions for filling vacancies in the board, for calling meetings, for determining a quorum, for passing, amending or repealing by-laws,—not to be repugnant to the statutes of New York or to the laws of England,—and for appointing a Treasurer, a Secretary and a Librarian. Members were to be privileged to sell, assign or devise their rights, such assigns to become members in full standing, but only when owning whole shares; and the Trustees might elect as members of the corporation whom they should think proper. After regulating the annual dues (ten shillings), the penalties for arrears, forfeitures, etc., it is stated in conclusion that the charter should be "deemed, adjudged and construed in all Cases, most favourably and for the best Benefit and Advantage of our said Corporation."

There is afforded here for the first time an opportunity to compare the membership with that at the outset. The fifty-nine names mentioned in the charter show a falling-off of exactly fifty per cent. from the original subscription list. But it must be borne in mind that numerous "rights" had been bequeathed, or otherwise "alienated," during these eighteen years; while not a few members held several shares. Thus it cannot be told just how many paying shares there were. Undoubtedly, however, there had not been anything like the substantial accessions hoped for, if increase there had been.

How agitated and proud these sturdy workers must have been to behold realized at last their cherished hopes of many years! Content to labor and to wait for the success now attained, they must have felt the happiness of the moment well worth all the weary planning and the time and money spent. It is good to find at least a few of the prime movers of the undertaking still on the board of Trustees, namely, William Smith the historian, Robert R. Livingston and William Livingston, together with John Watts, who had served, with the exception of but a single year, from the beginning to the now fast-approaching political convulsion.

In the first flush of their triumph and increased importance, however, they were not unmindful of favors received. Their initial act as a corporation was to confer honorary membership upon Governor Tryon, Attorney-General John Tabor Kempe, and William Banyar, nephew of Goldsbrow Banyar, deputy-secretary of the province, through whose united instrumentality the charter had been gratuitously granted and passed. Each of the three was to receive a certificate of

admission, it was voted, with the naïve qualification, "as soon as one shall be procured."

After a careful revision of the by-laws,—the schedule of loans and penalties being identical with the last statement, but the hours of attendance increased to three days, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from twelve to two, "Holy-Days excepted,"—the Trustees, clothed in their new powers, proceeded to appoint, or really to confirm, Samuel Jones as Treasurer and James Wilmot as "Keeper of the said Library." A departure was made in appointing Dr. Samuel Bard, Secretary, an office formerly identified, as "Clerk," with the treasurer-ship. It was then voted to have the "Terms of Admission" published for three weeks "in the News Paper printed by Hugh Gaine," who should also have the contract for printing the charter, by-laws and a fresh catalogue. Finally the Treasurer was ordered to "lay before this Board at the next Meeting a Device for a Seal."

In compliance with the first of these directions, a notice that the Trustees had "obtained a Charter of Incorporation," and would "now admit new Members upon Payment of Five Pounds each, for the Use of the Library," appeared in *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury* for three weeks, beginning on January 11th. It also announced the speedy issuance of a new catalogue, which was promptly forthcoming. This Catalogue of 1773, a copy of which the Library is so fortunate as to own, though a larger affair than the earlier issues, is yet but a modest paper-covered pamphlet of thirty-six pages.<sup>1</sup> Eight pages are devoted to a

<sup>1</sup> *The Charter, and Bye-Laws, of the New-York Society Library; with a Catalogue of the Books belonging to the said Library.* New York, 1773. Gaine's receipt shows that he was paid £10 8s for 500 copies.



closely printed copy of the charter, and three succeeding pages comprehend revised "Laws, Ordinances, and Regulations." The catalogue proper contains a total of 1291 volumes, the last accounting before their shameful dispersion.

To revert to the charter,—some little amusement may have been excited at the last-named incorporator, "Anne Waddel, Widow," as though that title were her calling in life! John Waddell, her husband, had been one of the original subscribers to the Library movement, and it is interesting to see how she was here perpetuating his as well as her own regard for the institution. It is also noteworthy that a woman's name should have been allowed to stand on such a very legal document, showing that there was no law to forbid, nor, fully as requisite, any social convention either.<sup>1</sup> As in this instance, so throughout its history, the Society Library has ever welcomed women to enrolment as shareholders, with unrestricted access to the shelves.

It would be needless to make this trite statement, were it not for the fact that such an attitude is quite in contrast to that evinced by the Boston Athenæum, for example, where no women were allowed to consult books prior to 1829, nor for some years thereafter, save in one or two exceptional cases. As late as 1856, Librarian Folsom of that institution reported it "as undesirable, that a modest young woman should have anything to do with the corrupter portions of the polite literature. A considerable portion of a general library should be to her a sealed book." He further asserts that the proposed

<sup>1</sup> Anne (Kirten) Waddell, born in 1716, was a lady of uncommon ability and force of character, conducting her husband's large shipping

interests (after his decease in 1762) with great profit, until her own death in 1773.



Mrs. Anne (Kirten) Waddell

Widow of Captain John Waddell. Only woman named  
in the Charter, 1772





concession to admit women to the shelves "would occasion frequent embarrassment to modest men."<sup>1</sup>

Before continuing the narrative, a further word is pertinent in regard to the Union Library Society. As we have seen,<sup>2</sup> this institution thrived and bade fair to become no slight menace to the prosperity of the Society Library. No sooner had the latter's incorporation been announced in the newspapers, than the Directors of the younger institution promptly published a notice, emphasizing their moderate terms, stating their collection to contain "near 1000 volumes," and claiming a membership of 140 persons,—rather more than double the number of shareholders enumerated a few months before in the charter of the Society Library.

Furthermore, the action of the Common Council in April, 1774, allowing the Union Library Society to deposit its books in the same room that held their own collection, must have been unspeakably irritating to the pride of the Trustees, so lately exalted by the investiture of chartered rights. It was indeed but a shabby return by the city fathers for the care of the old Corporation Library during so many years, for there is no mention in the municipal records that the city paid for a Librarian after Thomas Jackson retired in 1768. Truly the hazards of war would then have seemed to the Trustees hardly more insupportable than so forced and distasteful a companionship.

Less than thirty days after this ungracious act of the Common Council, and fully sixteen months since a recorded session of the board, there was held what proved to be the last meeting of the Trustees for many a

<sup>1</sup> Report, March 29, 1856. MS. in *Influence and History of the Boston Athenæum*. Boston, 1907. P. 41.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, pp. 112-118.

day. Eleven members constituted this gathering, at the Exchange, May 9, 1774. Various matters came up for consideration, both retrospectively and, as they doubtless supposed, for the unbroken future. In the first place, acting on previous instructions, "the Treasurer and Secretary laid before the Trustees a Device for a Seal of which they approved," and ordered "to have it immediately cast in Steel."

Several cheering items next gladden the eye: the treasury shows a balance of £116:7:9½; and five new members had lately been enrolled, including the Rev. Dr. Inglis, fourth rector of Trinity Church, the Rev. John H. Livingston, of the Dutch Reformed communion, and John Jones, M.D.,—the last-named just chosen a Trustee, and the second destined to serve fully a quarter-century later. Also it was recorded that "M<sup>r</sup> Sam<sup>l</sup> Verplank purchased the Share of M<sup>r</sup> Rob<sup>t</sup> Cromline and paid up the arrears,"—the first mention of such a transfer in the minutes. Encouragement from these evidences of prosperity appears in the single entry: "*Ordered*, That M<sup>r</sup> Kettletass purchase one dozen Winsor Chairs, and two step Ladders for the use of the Library."

Quite a notable departure from custom was made in a vote to hold the annual meetings for the future at the City Hall instead of at the Exchange. Another by-law, then adopted, fixed Trustee meetings "for the Dispatch of Business . . . at the Library Room upon the first Tuesday in y<sup>e</sup> months of Aprill, July, October, and January at twelve o'Clock at noon." After agreeing "to the purchase of Books of wh<sup>h</sup> a Catalogue" was exhibited, and voting that all volumes "wanting to complete old sets be replaced," it was finally "*Order'd*, That

Doct. John Jones, M<sup>r</sup> Kettletass, M<sup>r</sup> Treasurer, Peter Vanschaack, or any three of them, be a Committy to do the above Business."

Having ascertained the character of the original collection, and knowing who were the early members of the Society Library, the natural wish follows, as the night the day, to learn something of the actual handling of the books; who read what! Happily this desire it is possible to gratify to a slight extent, for there remains a discolored rough draft of a manuscript catalogue in folio, without date or cover, not untidily fastened by a once blue ribbon. Following some twenty of the titles in a fragmentary fashion are jotted down the names of occasional borrowers throughout the colonial period, as follows:

Addison's Works 4 Vols. (4<sup>th</sup> Vol. wanting), John Provoost; Bacon's Works, 3 Vols. (1<sup>st</sup> Vol. want.), Basnages History of the Jews, Ab<sup>m</sup> Depeyster, Oct<sup>r</sup> 29, 1767; Columelle on Husbandry and Trees, Ja<sup>s</sup> Depeyster by Peter Dubois, June 15, 1766; Chubb's posthumous Works, 2 Vols., Peter V B Livingston, April 9<sup>th</sup> 1770; Cicero's Orations by Guthrie, 3 Vols., Cornelius Van Horne, 7<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup> 1769; Albers Lives of the Poets, 5 Vols. (1<sup>st</sup> Vol. wanting), Edw<sup>d</sup> Nicoll, May 12, 1766; Cato's Letters, 4 Vols. (1<sup>st</sup> Vol. wanting), Phil. Livingston, 14 March, 1768; Franklin on Electricity, Augustus V Cortlandt, August 10, 1756; Grandison, 7 Vols., Nathan<sup>l</sup> Marston, March 13, 1769; Kiel's Astronomy, W<sup>m</sup> Laight, 24 Sept<sup>r</sup> 1772; Kiesler's Travels, 4 Vols. (1<sup>st</sup> Vol. wanting), W<sup>m</sup> Imlay, March 7, 1753 [1773?]; Maintenon's Letters, 2 Vols., Stephen D'Lancey, Sept<sup>r</sup> 22, 1766; Montague's Letters, 4 Vols., y<sup>e</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Smith Sen<sup>r</sup> Ap 28<sup>th</sup> 1768; Philosophical Transactions, 10 Vols., Ab<sup>m</sup> Brinckerhoff; ancient History, 10 Vols. (1<sup>st</sup> Vol. wantg), Rob<sup>t</sup> G. Livingston, Dec<sup>r</sup> 19, 1765; System of Geography, 2 Vols., Henry Remsen; Sheridans Lectures on Elocution, Jn<sup>o</sup> Living-



ston, Dec<sup>r</sup> 6, 1768; Warburton's Shakespear, 8 Vols. (y<sup>e</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Vols. want<sup>g</sup>), 6<sup>th</sup> Vol., L. Cortwright, October 6<sup>th</sup> 1768; Whiston's Theory of the Earth, Alex<sup>r</sup> Cummings, Dec<sup>r</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> 1757; Waller's Poems, John Dies, Apr<sup>l</sup> 5, 1762.

In accordance with the new by-law, notice of the annual meeting and election of 1775—"to be held at Twelve o'Clock at Noon, in the Library Room"—was duly inserted by Secretary Bard in the *Gazette* for April 24<sup>th</sup>. But from a minute of later date it appears that "no meeting of the proprietors for the choice of Trustees was held from the last Tuesday in April 1774," until December 20, 1788. Consequently we must assume that the board last elected continued in office, "until other fit Persons" were "chosen in their Places,"—to quote the language of the charter. During these fourteen years no meetings appear to have been held; and one would think the business of the corporation wholly suspended in 1774, were it not for the above mentioned newspaper notice and certain memoranda by Treasurer Jones in the old minute books.

Furthermore, there has survived a receipt for £5, signed by George Murray, for "half a Year's Attendance as Librarian from July the 6<sup>th</sup> to Jan<sup>y</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> 1776." From the Treasurer's meager accounts it appears that Mr. Murray had succeeded James Wilmot on May 1, 1774, at an advance of £4 a year, for attending "three times a Week." Of these two persons, little can now be told. James Wilmot's name appears among the 3000 signatures of "Principal Male Inhabitants"<sup>1</sup> in 1774, while George Murray, a Quaker, kept a select school on Crown (Liberty) street, opposite the Friends' Meeting

<sup>1</sup> See p. 166n.

House.<sup>1</sup> He reopened this institution in April, 1783,<sup>2</sup> but died a few months later "at an advanced age."<sup>3</sup>

For aught now known to the contrary, therefore, George Murray was the last Librarian before the Revolution; while there is nothing to prove that the work of the Library did not continue as usual until September, 1776, save the natural belief, as expressed in the manuscript "Matricula" of King's College for that year, that "The Turbulence & Confusion which prevail in every part of the Country effectually suppress every literary Pursuit." Still, a positive indication of Library activity appears in a notice in the *Mercury*, August 7, 1775, calling for the return, "without Delay," of some thirty-odd books "belonging to the New-York Society Library."

No little pathos may be read into the detailed and careful deliberations at the last meeting outlined above, in view of the fact that more than fourteen long years of stress and anxiety were to run their course before another gathering would be held, at which, indeed, only four of this group would respond to roll-call. The Society Library, with kindred institutions of culture and of peace, was early to undergo suspension and well-nigh complete disruption at the blighting touch of war. In the record of this last assembling of its Trustees before the storm, however, no note of apprehension was sounded, matters relative to the welfare of the association alone finding attention. It is altogether fitting that the curtain should go down with all the actors in

<sup>1</sup> *New York City during the American Revolution*, New York, 1861. P. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury*, Apl. 28, 1783.

<sup>3</sup> *Rivington's Royal Gazette*, Sept. 10, 1783.

their proper places, conscientiously playing their appointed parts.

What poor beleaguered New York suffered in the throes of revolution it happily does not fall within the bounds of this narrative to recount. Possessing from its situation one of the chief strategic points in the colonies, it was indeed a vantage-ground to be fought for desperately. Within the city, feeling had long been running high between malcontents and upholders of prerogative, and had voiced itself in repeated outbreaks between the ardent Liberty Boys and his Majesty's troops. The British occupation of seven years had good effect in stopping these bickerings perforce, but it was none the less notorious for lawless practices of the soldiery. A spirited account of such depredations as pertain to this study has already been quoted in connection with the history of King's College Library.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, in the same section of the present work, are given details of efforts on the part of British commanders to accomplish a return of at least a portion of the plundered collections.<sup>2</sup> In commenting on these outrages, Judge Jones condescendingly observes: "To do justice even to rebels, let it be here mentioned that though they were in full possession of New York nearly seven months, and had in it at times above 40,000 men, neither of these libraries were ever meddled with (the telescope which General Washington took excepted)"!<sup>3</sup> In a similar spirit of fairness, therefore, it must be admitted that the invaders were not alone in the destruction of books, though for sheer wantonness and cupidity

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 94-95.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 95-97.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jones. *History of New York during the Revolutionary*

*War*. Vol. II, p. 137. This telescope now adorns the mantle of the beautiful Trustees' Room in the Library of Columbia University.



they stand unrivaled. It is said that in one instance a whole edition of the Rev. Gilbert Tennent's sermon, "Defensive War," printed by Franklin, "was utilized by revolted colonists for the manufacture of musket cartridges to aid in driving King George's Hessian mercenaries off the soil, and to establish American liberty in place of foreign tyranny."<sup>1</sup>

However this may have been, the one melancholy indisputable fact remains that all the Libraries of the city were either burned or looted, their precious contents ruthlessly scattered to the four winds. Not least among them, the Society Library, the fruit of more than twenty years of planning, of labor and of sacrifice, was in a twinkling stricken seemingly with utter annihilation.

In the eighteen years ending with 1776, only ten new names appear on the board of Trustees. Two were merchants of high repute: Walter Rutherford,—styled "Gentleman" in the charter,—a Scotchman by birth, a founder and for some years president of St. Andrew's Society, an incorporator and later a governor of the New York Hospital, a brother-in-law of the Earl of Sterling, was a man of unblemished integrity; as was also his associate, Samuel Verplanck, a scion of one of the oldest Dutch families, a member of the first class graduated by King's College in 1758, a Wall Street importer and banker of scholarly tastes, one of the twenty-four founders of the Chamber of Commerce, a member of the "General Committee of One Hundred" in 1775, a delegate to the provincial convention of New York, and a subscriber to the celebrated Declaration of Association and Union against the pretensions of Great

<sup>1</sup> *The Memorial History of the City of New-York*, vol. IV, p. 115.

Britain; though, from dread of consequences, it is stated, inactive in support of the Revolution.

Three of them have lent distinction to the noble healing art: John and Samuel Bard, father and son, Philadelphians by birth, though of mingled French and English ancestry. Gifted alike with engaging manners, unusual ability and capacity for hard work, they numbered among their intimate friends Franklin and other noted persons in America and Europe. They were instrumental in securing a charter of incorporation for a public hospital, and in raising funds privately for its support. Dr. Samuel Bard was chief agent in founding the first medical school in New York, soon annexed to the college. On its staff for forty years, he also served as a trustee and dean of its medical faculty, and was likewise a vestryman of Trinity parish. While the city was the seat of the Federal Government, he acted as Washington's family physician, a circumstance tending to allay distrust aroused by his moderate course during the war. His services to the Library cover an extended term as Trustee and Secretary.

The name of John Jones long stood at the head of the surgical profession in this country. A professor in King's College, he was a pioneer in introducing plain and simple measures in place of prevailing methods. Removing to Philadelphia and achieving renown, he became the medical attendant and as well the friend of Dr. Franklin.

Half of the number were members of the legal brotherhood. Whitehead Hicks, fellow-student with William Livingston and William Smith, Jr., under the latter's father, became an alderman and held the mayoralty for the long term of nearly ten years. He resigned

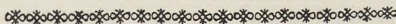
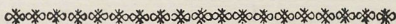
for a judgeship in the supreme court, but, owing to his Whig principles, never took his seat. Besides the Library, he served the Presbyterian Church as a trustee for

A

CATALOGUE  
*John Stevenson*  
 OF THE  
 BOOKS

BELONGING TO THE

NEW-YORK Society LIBRARY.



NEW-YORK:

Printed and Sold by W. Gaine, at the Bible and Crown,  
 in Hanover-Square.

( Probably 1758. ) m.s. B

Earliest catalogue of the Society Library, or of any Library in New York,  
 known to be in existence (facsimile size). See pp. 167-168.



some years. Jovial in disposition, he was popular with his associates at the bar and with the public. Of opposing views was John Tabor Kempe, attorney-general of the province, and long a vestryman and warden of Old Trinity. Removing to England when the war closed, he passed his remaining years in poverty and neglect, his services unheeded by an indifferent sovereign.

Samuel Jones, Treasurer for many years, was also a man of Tory sympathies, but he took no part in the war; and, upon the consummation of peace, threw in his lot with the new nation, becoming one of the foremost metropolitan lawyers and jurists, eminent and useful in public life. He sat for years in the state legislature, both as assemblyman and as senator, at the same time holding such offices as city recorder and state comptroller, aiding materially the while in the first revision of the statutes. Chancellor Kent pays tribute to his lucidity and accurate learning, while Dr. David Hosack says: "Common consent has assigned him . . . the appellation of father of the New York bar."

Peter Van Schaack, LL.D., a leading member of another well-known Knickerbocker family, and for years a vestryman of Trinity parish, was banished to England early in the war for his loyalist leanings. On his return, in 1785, he met with a cordial reception from his former brethren of the bar. He conducted a law school, where many young men were trained for the profession, and he also published several substantial works on legal topics.

Most illustrious of them all, however, and destined to a fame of more than national proportions, shines forth the name of Robert R. Livingston, Jr., or Chancellor Livingston, as he was subsequently called. His career

is too well known to be dwelt upon here. Carefully brought up by his father, graduated from King's College, a law partner of John Jay, he came to hold in turn the honorable offices of city recorder, assemblyman, and delegate to Congress before the war. Though a member of the congressional committee which drew up the Declaration of Independence, a summons to the provincial assembly alone prevented his signing that immortal document.

No less interested in his church, he was a warden of Trinity parish in its trying season just after the Revolution. The first chancellor of the state of New York, from 1777 to 1801, he was for two years national Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and chairman of the state convention that ratified the Federal Constitution. It was his proud distinction to administer the oath of office to General Washington as first President of the United States. His name is also linked with that of Robert Fulton in the latter's successful application of steam to navigation. But his chief claim to a nation's gratitude lies in his negotiation, in 1803, while minister to France, of the famous Louisiana Purchase, an event whose centennial anniversary was but lately commemorated in the great St. Louis Exposition by all the world.

## IV

STARTING AFRESH, 1788-1791

**T**HE close of the Revolution found New York in a pitiable plight. Not merely had all enterprise stagnated but there had been sad retrogression. All the churches except St. Paul's Chapel had been demolished or desecrated. There were no charitable institutions at all, no banks or insurance companies. Trade was at a standstill, education had been suppressed, with schools and the college closed, and the claims of letters all unheeded. The residence section stopped short of Murray street, with quantities of vacant lots besides the burned-out areas still littered with ashes. Hosts of inhabitants, many of them once wealthy and influential, had left never to return. The whole population at the time of evacuation comprised scarce 20,000 souls.

But with a restoration of civil government, resumption of confidence set in, and the city gradually came to its own again, belief in its destiny fast regaining strength. Of the first seven years' progress a contemporary wrote:

The spring given to the human mind, by means of the American revolution, has, in no part of the union, been more fully evidenced than in New-York. This city, like a phoenix arising out of its parent's ashes, is rapidly soaring far beyond the flight



of former times; and the numerous improvements, both public and private, while they attract the admiration and praise of travellers, really create astonishment in our citizens themselves, and "*who would have thought it!*" is the universal exclamation of every tongue.<sup>1</sup>

This writer observes that "few of the distressing circumstances which befel the devoted capital of this state during the late glorious struggle for American liberty were more injurious than the loss of the library which had been founded some years before," and which "had increased to a considerable collection of the choicest authors." But "the private losses of most of the citizens who returned to their desolate habitations," he adds, "were too severe to permit attention for some time to any thing but private concerns." With the rebound in material affairs, however, came a natural craving for the brighter and better things in life. "The cause of science and literature at length arrested the public attention," the same article reports, and found its embodiment in a revival of the college and of the Society Library.

Although no Trustee meetings are recorded for an interval of fourteen years, this does not necessarily prove that no conference took place. By the terms of the charter the Trustees chosen in 1774 held office until an election of successors. That some of them assembled at least once is evident from this notice in *The New-York Packet* for February 16, 1784, entitled "Books," and signed by Dr. Samuel Bard "by order of the Trustees":

SUCH PERSONS who have in their possession any of the BOOKS belonging to the NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY,

<sup>1</sup>From an article "On the Utility of Public Libraries" in *The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository* for June, 1791.

are requested to send them to Peter Kettletas, No. , Wall-street, Walter Rutherford, No. , Broad-way, Samuel Bard, No. 44, Broad-street, or Samuel L. Mitchill,<sup>1</sup> No. 50, Water-street.

This attempt, less than three months after the evacuation of the city, proved premature, though it was not the first local endeavor to revive interest in books. A few days prior to the departure of the British troops, Samuel Loudon had advertised his intention of soon reopening his Circulating Library of "about two thousand volumes."<sup>2</sup> The results of Dr. Bard's notice cannot have been ample and they certainly were not immediate, for nearly five more years elapsed before the fresh start was actually made. The next reference to the movement was a card in *The Daily Advertiser* for December 15-20, 1788, again signed by Dr. Bard, "Sec'ry," to this effect:

☞ The following Gentlemen, Proprietors of the NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, are requested to meet at the Coffee-House<sup>3</sup> on SATURDAY next, at Six o'clock in the evening, in order to choose Trustees, and to consult on measures for the speedy re-establishment of that useful institution; John Alsop, Garrit Abeel, T. Bache, W. Bayard, M. Clarkson, P. T. Curtenius, J. Desbrosses, J. Farquhar, M. Gomez, J. Griswold, H. Gaine, J. Hunt, J. Jauncey, P. Kettletas, L. Lispenard, W. Ludlow, G. Ludlow, R. Morris, W. Rutherford, H. Remsen, L. Scot, D. Van Horne, R. Watts, W. Walton, J. Wiley, together with such of the non-resident proprietors of the said Library as may then be in town.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably appointed at some unrecorded meeting, in conformity with the charter provision authorizing the board to "nominate and choose another" to fill a vacancy. Dr. Mitchill was not regularly elected a Trustee until 1793.

<sup>2</sup> *The New-York Gazetteer*, Nov. 17, 1788. See also p. 111n.

<sup>3</sup> The Merchants' Coffee-House, corner of Wall and Water streets, kept at that time by the widow Bradford.

Accordingly the books of minutes were brought out from their long concealment, and record of the caucus was thus entered:

The accidents of the late War having nearly destroyed the former Library, no meeting of the proprietors for the choice of Trustees was held from the last Tuesday in April 1774 until Saturday y<sup>e</sup> 20<sup>1</sup> December 1788, when a meeting of the proprietors was summoned . . . at which The Hon<sup>ble</sup> Rob<sup>t</sup> R. Livingston, Rob<sup>t</sup> Watts, Brockholst Livingston, Sam<sup>l</sup> Jones, Peter Kittletas, Walter Rutherford, Mathew Clarkson, Samuel Bard, Hugh Gainé, Dan<sup>l</sup> C. Verplanck, Ed<sup>d</sup> Greswold, Hen<sup>y</sup> Remsen were chosen Trustees to act until the next annual Election.

Thereupon Samuel Jones was reappointed Treasurer, and Dr. Bard, Secretary; while Messrs. Bard, Verplanck and Greswold were deputed "to take the necessary measures" to revive the charter. It is of course impossible to tell just how many former shareholders rallied to the reorganization. They were soon far outnumbered by new recruits; and, as Dr. Mitchill wrote years later that "the present library has been purchased since 1784,"<sup>2</sup> the collection, too, had to be started all over again.

In noting the names of the newly elected board, it is of interest to find, in three of its members, sons of original Trustees, Robert R. Livingston, Robert Watts and Brockholst Livingston, son of the redoubtable war governor. Also, in the selection of Messrs. Clarkson and Verplanck appear further instances of hereditary succession. Five of the number, Messrs. Jones, Keteltas, Rutherford, Bard and R. R. Livingston, were veteran Trustees.

<sup>1</sup>Through a clerical error, the original entry reads "21."

<sup>2</sup>*The Picture of New-York.* 1807. P. 114.



Conspicuous among early members of the Chamber of Commerce appears the name of Robert Watts. In the Revolution he played no active part, remaining quietly loyal to the crown, attending to his private concerns. This attitude was perhaps a resultant of conflicting forces, inherited principles and later influences; for, while his father and his uncle, James De Lancey, were stiff-necked royalists, he was a son-in-law of that stanch patriot, Lord Stirling.

The career of Brockholst Livingston is as varied as it is stirring and distinguished. Graduated from Princeton on the eve of war, he at once espoused his country's cause. After winning honors and a lieutenant-colonelcy at Saratoga, he acted as private secretary to his brother-in-law, John Jay, when minister to Spain. Admitted to the bar on the conclusion of peace, he met with rapid advancement from one dignity to another, until appointed to the United States Supreme Court. His other positions of responsibility included trusteeship of the Presbyterian Church, of the Historical Society, and of Columbia College, of which last he was treasurer for nearly forty years. Numerous party pamphlets signed "Decius" are from his trenchant pen. He ranks with Hamilton, Burr, Egbert Benson and others of his day as a fluent speaker, an able advocate and an accomplished scholar.

Similarly, Matthew Clarkson won his spurs at Saratoga, as aide to the impetuous Arnold, retiring from the war a major-general. Attentive to business, he yet gladly made time for manifold outside interests. As a regent of Columbia College in 1784, he was its special representative to solicit subscriptions abroad. Long a vestryman of Trinity parish, his counsel was also sought

in directing the Manufacturing Society, as a prison commissioner, and in establishing the free public school system in 1806. For thirty years a governor of the New York Hospital, of which he was vice-president, as also of the American Bible Society, he was for twenty-one years president of the Bank of New York. He was increasingly worthy of his characterization by John Jay to President Washington in 1790: "Few men here of his standing enjoy or deserve a greater degree of the esteem and good-will of the citizens."

The name of Hugh Gainé has often been mentioned in these pages as enterprising printer and bookseller. From now until the day of his death, eighteen years later, he appears as one of the most devoted Trustees of the Library, of which indeed he had long been a member. Of Scotch-Irish birth, he had landed in New York in 1745 at the age of eighteen, "without basket or burden," as he himself says. Though blessed with few advantages, he was boundlessly ambitious, like Franklin. Apprenticed to James Parker the printer, at the time of his management of the Corporation Library, he may have drawn inspiration from a perusal of some of the old Millington books. His successful career as a printer and his interesting "journalistic straddle" during the Revolution, as also his useful later life, have been fully and ably presented in monographic studies.<sup>1</sup>

Chosen a Trustee at the early age of twenty-six, Daniel C. Verplanck, son of Samuel, proved himself a worthy member, for he was present at every session but one of his term. Removing from the city, he afterward became a lawyer of note, several times a representative

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Journals of Hugh Gainé*, by Paul Leicester Ford. New York, 1902. *Sketches of Printers and Printing in Colonial New York*, by Charles R. Hildeburn. New York, 1895.

in Congress and judge in the common pleas court for Dutchess county.

Of Edward Greswold but little can be told. He was an attorney of standing, licensed to plead causes before the state supreme court, and on one occasion he was appointed an inspector of elections in the Montgomerie ward. His comparative obscurity serves to bring into stronger relief the position and achievements of his associates.

Among the oldest of the company was Henry Remsen, a merchant prince indeed, of the guild which the name of Peter Faneuil of Boston—himself the son of a New York tradesman—so imperishably adorns. Stoutly Whig in conviction, he had been energetic in favor of non-importation, despite its disastrous effects upon his own interests. Identified with the several Revolutionary committees, he was also a member of the provincial convention, and personally aided the patriot troops with supplies until the British occupation. On the restoration of peace he was foremost in the work of general rehabilitation.

Turning attention now to the proceedings of these gentlemen in behalf of the Library, we notice first their despatch. The committee appointed to revive the charter appears to have acted promptly and with gratifying success, for the next entry is a verbatim recital of "An Act to remove doubts respecting the Charter granted to the members of the New York Society Library," passed February 18, 1789, by the state legislature.

This enactment declares the charter of the corporation to be "in full force, virtue and efficacy to all intents, constructions and purposes in the Law whatsoever, notwithstanding any non-user or mis-user thereof, or any



part thereof," between the 18th day of April, 1775,<sup>1</sup> and its date of passage. Members and their legal representatives had all rights and privileges confirmed, despite arrears, which were "remitted" without qualification. The act concludes with a ratification of the board chosen in December, stipulating for a new election at the regular time in April, "according to the said Charter."

Meanwhile the Trustees, encouraged by evidences of interest, authorized a long statement for the local press, the passages here quoted appearing in the *Packet* at intervals for about four months, beginning with the issue of January 9, 1789, as follows:

Solicitous to revive this useful institution, and to meet the wishes of many of their fellow citizens, who have expressed their desire to join them, they [the Trustees] have come to a resolution, 'to admit new members, upon paying into the hands of their treasurer the sum of five pounds; which was the original sum paid by the first subscribers, and which each share is now worth; or in lieu of money to receive books to the amount, provided they are such as the committee chosen for that purpose shall approve.'

Considering next "the many and great advantages which may result from a well chosen public Library," such as "the ready information it will afford to the philosopher, the politician and the artist; the improvement in arts and sciences which it will introduce; the general diffusion of knowledge, the advancement of true taste, and the increase of public virtue which it will promote,"—"and all upon terms so cheap and easy, as to be within the reach of almost every individual,"—there

<sup>1</sup> The last day on which a royal charter might be considered binding, the Lexington-Concord affair being

regarded as the outbreak of war, on the 19th.

was no doubt that citizens would "zealously join in advancing so beneficial an institution."

Next the investment idea—still a feature of the Library and destined so to be as long as it continues a corporation of shareholders—is delineated as follows: "Nothing is given away, but each right is an estate which the proprietor is laying up for his heirs, or which he may sell to whom he pleases, and which is gradually accumulating and becoming more and more valuable by the addition of ten shillings per annum from each proprietor." The notice ends with urging heirs or assigns of former proprietors to claim their "rights," and with a renewed call for lost books, "known by the arms pasted in front."

One other topic touched upon in this announcement relates to a matter very near the hearts of New Yorkers at that time, namely, the hope of having their city chosen as permanent seat of the Federal Government. The bearing of the Library upon the question is thus explained: "Nor will it be thought a trifling motive to a speedy exertion, that a useful public Library will add to the inducement which Congress have to remain with us, and that the want of one has actually been advanced as one among other reasons for removing the general government from this city."

In the meantime, also, application had been made to the local authorities for permission to reestablish the institution in its former accommodations. The request met with rather passive acquiescence on the part of the Common Council in a resolution of January 7, 1789, "that this Board have no Objection to the appropriation of the uppermost Room in the South East part of the City Hall to the use of the Society Library provided the



Federal Hall, Wall Street, corner of Nassau, facing Broad Street

Home of the New York Society Library, 1789–1795. Site of present Sub-Treasury Building

On the balcony here shown General George Washington was inaugurated first

President of the United States, April 30, 1789





same shall not be necessary for the accommodation of the Gen<sup>l</sup> Gov<sup>t</sup> of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> This act on the part of the Corporation of the city was the more gracious since it no longer had a collection of its own to “be improved for the public advantage in like manner with the Books” of the Society Library.<sup>2</sup>

In preparation for the inauguration of the Constitutional experiment in New York, the City Hall had been elaborately altered and enlarged under direction of the French engineer and architect, Major Charles L’Enfant, and now, as Federal Hall, was to be ceremoniously handed over for the exclusive use of the new Government,—the Common Council, legislature and courts arranging to hold sessions in the Exchange. Thus the Library would be the sole occupant of the building not in any way connected with the Federal administration.

Such a prospect was by no means forbidding to the men at the helm, to judge from a resolution at their next meeting, April 7th, at the City Hall, that Messrs. Verplanck and Greswold “apply to the Congress of the United States to know if they can spare the room in the City Hall which on those occasions has been assigned by the Corporation of this City for the purpose of depositing the Books belonging to this Corporation.” There is no further allusion to the matter in the minutes, while the journals of Congress, fragmentary at best in those early days, are equally reticent, not so much as mentioning receipt of the petition.

All that can be definitely asserted, then, is that the petition must have been granted in some way, for it is a fact that the Library soon resumed its mission amid

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the Common Council* (MS.), kept in the City Hall.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 77.

familiar though improved surroundings. And certain it is that the Trustees met in the City Hall, as above quoted, even before presenting their memorial, though of course they had made no attempt to store any books there. Also, at the same time and place, they directed Secretary Bard to advertise the annual election "to be held at the City hall upon the last Tuesday in the present month."

Consequently there is the justifiable assumption that the petition was favorably received. In return for this courtesy, the privileges of membership were conferred upon the national legislators at the first session of Congress, as had been done by the Library Company of Philadelphia toward the members of the First Continental Congress in August, 1774. As yet Congress had no Library of its own, so it may be said with due regard to the verities, that the first Library of the Federal Congress of the United States was the New York Society Library!<sup>1</sup>

The last Tuesday of April, 1789, fell on the 28th, but two days before the memorable inauguration of General Washington as first President of the United States.<sup>2</sup> Local papers were therefore too full of the incidents of that impressive ceremony and its attendant festivities, to devote any attention to the results of a simple Library election. The minutes make no mention of the meeting,

<sup>1</sup> Mention of this relationship is made in the report of the Librarian of Congress for 1901, p. 183; but the dates there given are inaccurate, not merely so far as the Society Library is concerned, but also with reference to the time when the "Federal Congress" sat in New York. The fact is properly stated, however, in the *History of the Library of Congress*. Washington, 1904. Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> On his triumphal progress to

New York that great man was entertained among other places at "Boxwood Hall," the handsome home of the Hon. Elias Boudinot. Here at "an elegant luncheon" were assembled to meet him, among others, Governor Livingston of New Jersey, Egbert Benson, the Hon. William Samuel Johnson, John Pintard and Chancellor Livingston, all former, present or destined Trustees of the Society Library.



or of the reorganization of the board thereafter; but from the little old city directory it appears that Samuel Jones was reëlected Treasurer, Edward Greswold, Secretary, and for Librarian the Trustees appointed the Rev. George Wright, "minister of Brooklyn," residing at "13 Dye's-street." This gentleman, a native of Ireland, was the first Episcopal clergyman in Brooklyn, and laid in 1784 the foundations of what is now the venerable and prosperous parish of St. Ann's-on-the-Heights. He continued his ministrations there "until some time about the middle of the year 1789."<sup>1</sup> He then passed a number of months in Jamaica, whence he set sail for Nova Scotia. The accounts of Treasurer Jones show that he was paid on January 26, 1790, the sum of £10 16s 2d for a year's salary and sundry collections.

The sole change in the board at this first regular election was the retirement of Peter Keteltas in favor of Gulian Verplanck, another eminent merchant. A younger brother of Samuel, he was also an alumnus of King's College, and became later one of the early regents of the University of the State of New York. Elected to the assembly several times, he twice held the speakership. For the last eight years of his life he was president of the Bank of New York.

When the board finally convened, November 11, 1789, at Simmons' Tavern, corner of Wall and Nassau streets, it made a full revision of the by-laws, repealing all former rulings. The chief features of the new set of nine regulations were:

1. a continuation of £5 and 10s respectively, as the price of a share and the annual payment; 2. that the Librarian should

<sup>1</sup> *St. Ann's Church (Brooklyn), 1784-1845.* By F. G. Fish. Brooklyn, 1845. P. 21.

attend from twelve to two on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons, and also must render an accounting to the Treasurer every three months; 3. that the period of loans remain as previously determined, with the inclusion of pamphlets as duodecimo books. Also, persons without the city limits might "detain" a volume double the ordinary time with the privilege of renewal, unless called for; 4. a rearrangement of the schedule of penalties for overdue books, as follows: "fol., 4<sup>d</sup>; 4to, 3<sup>d</sup>; 8vo, 2<sup>d</sup>; & 12mo. or pamphlet, 1<sup>d</sup> per diem"; 5. that only members could take out books or pass "within the railings in the Library-room." (These last two rules were maintained unchanged until 1812.) In conclusion came regulations, precisely worded, as to the transfer of shares, the issuance of certificates, and the accountability of the Treasurer.

These by-laws, the charter and the validating act of the assembly, together with a complete catalogue of the collection and a full list of members as well, were published in pamphlet form in 1789. A copy of this compilation of 80 pages is in the possession of the Library to-day.<sup>1</sup> The collection then comprised about 3100 volumes. Such a showing is really astonishing so soon after the reorganization, but it is largely accounted for by the long array of "right" holders. Of these there are 239, arranged like the books in alphabetical order. Prominent among them, besides those to be found on the roster of Trustees, are such well-known names as Theophylact Bache, merchant, Aaron Burr, his Excellency Governor George Clinton, Mayor Duane, Alexander Hamilton, John Sloss Hobart, the jurist, Nicholas Fish, John Jay, ten members of the Livingston family (including Robert Livingston of the manor of Livingston,

<sup>1</sup> *The Charter, Bye-Laws, and Names of the Members of the New-York Society Library, with a Catalogue of the Books belonging to the*

*said Library.* New York (Hugh Gaine, printer), 1789. This copy is stamped with the name of Fred-eric De Peyster, "Junr."

Governor Livingston and Philip Livingston of Greenborough), Carey Ludlow, Samuel Loudon, the printer and editor, James McEvers, the stamp collector of pre-Revolutionary days, James Roosevelt, representatives of the Rhinelander family, William Seton, long identified with the Bank of New York, Isaac Stoutenburgh, a name found throughout the colonial period from earliest Dutch days, Van Cortlandts and Van Hornes, Col. Marinus Willett, a hero of the war who was to survive to greet General Lafayette in 1825, Recorder John Watts, and many others of all callings and pursuits.

At this point in the narrative a personal note will be welcome in an extract or two from a letter written by Dr. Samuel Bard to his daughter, probably in July, 1789. It shows a beautiful relationship to have existed between them, and is also interesting for the range of topics covered, comprising charming allusions to President Washington. The portion referring particularly to the subject in hand is as follows: "When you return home, you will never want proper Books, as we have been successful in storing our Society Library with near 2000 Volumes, among which are a great many very valuable, & it will annually receive an addition of the best new publications."<sup>1</sup>

Though not at all mentioned in the minutes, and not explicitly in the Treasurer's records, there was engraved, in the year 1789, the second bookplate of the Society Library. It was the work of Peter R. Maverick, who was paid, in June, 1789, "in full of his Account £11:

<sup>1</sup> Copied from an original, unsigned as undated, letter loaned by the Rev. W. Allen Johnson, of Littleton, Colo., a grandson of

Susan Bard (to whom the letter is written), afterward wife of Judge Johnston of Dutchess county, N. Y. See facsimile illustration, p. 214.



7:0," and again in February, 1790, "for a Seal, £5: 14:0."<sup>1</sup>

Nearly a year and a half elapses without an entry in the minutes, though there must have been a meeting held, to judge from a message emanating from the state

home you will never more purchase books, as we have been successful in storing our society library with near 2000 volumes among which are a great many very valuable — and it will annually receive on addition of the best new publications. —

— I shall be very sorry to find that you have not at least kept your own both in singing & playing, & should be very glad to discover some improvement among all the complimentary productions, to our President I wish you could find out the most delicate, and best set; & make yourself mistress of it — as he is my Patron, I should chuse to hear you sing his praises, the more particularly so, as his virtues & merits set off his glory or defiance. — I am much obliged to Miss Cooke for obliging you with a present of M<sup>rs</sup> Lopes home

Part of letter (reduced) from Dr. Samuel Bard to his daughter,  
written probably in July, 1789. See p. 213.

<sup>1</sup>The plate is thus described in Charles D. Allen's *American Book-Plates*, p. 256: "New York Society Library. Allegorical. Minerva[Athena], just alighted from the clouds, with garments somewhat displaced by her flight through the air, and with clouds still about her, finds an Indian waiting to receive the volume she holds out to him; as he lays hold

of it he seems to be offering his tomahawk in exchange. The shelves of the library are seen behind them, and in the gable the motto, *Emollit mores*, is painted. The oval frame enclosing this scene is upheld by ribbon and festoons, branches of oak are crossed beneath, and the plate is signed, *Maverick. Scit. Crown Street.*"

assembly under date of March 24, 1791, thanking the Trustees "for their polite offer to the Legislature at the beginning of the Session, and for the use of the said Library by the Members of this House." When finally the board did convene, on April 8, 1791, it was to hear with satisfaction of a "ballance" of over sixty pounds in the exchequer. More than half of this sum, however, was at once ordered paid to liquidate a debt to John Pintard, and the purchasing committee was directed to "buy of D<sup>r</sup> Johnson the Journals of the house of Commons." The office of Secretary was tendered to Jacob Morton, Edward Greswold then being about to retire from the board.

A radical move was made at the next meeting, August 18th, when, after appointing all future annual elections to be held "in the Library room," it was "*Resolved*, That the purchasing Committee acquaint the public with the State & Value of the Library, solicit Pamphlets and give notice that, twelve & an half Dollars being inadequate to the real Value of a share, from and after the first day of October next none will be sold under fifteen Dollars." Immediately after this vote John Pintard resigned from the purchasing committee, his place being filled by Rufus King, Esq. Whether his withdrawal expressed disapproval of the advance in price does not appear. Certainly the clause about collecting pamphlets bears the impress of his well-known spirit of public service in the preservation of records, which led, thirteen years later, to the foundation of the New York Historical Society.

In accordance with the action of the board, a statement was inserted in *The Daily Advertiser* for the last three days of August, as follows:

THE Library now consists of upwards of 3,000 volumes, containing the works of many eminent writers, ancient and modern. Considerable additions of the best publications are constantly making to the Library, and the members of the Society have lately very much encreased in number. To encourage the diffusion of science, as much as possible, the Trustees hitherto have demanded not more than 5 l. the original price of a share. Persuaded, that there are yet many citizens willing to promote this institution, and obtain an interest in so valuable a Library, but who thro' mere inattention have neglected to become members, the Trustees give this notice, that they will continue to receive 5 l. for a share until the *first* day of *October* next; but that, after that period, the price will positively be advanced to *Fifteen Dollars*. It will be remembered that this Society is incorporated, and the rights or shares transferrable.

The Trustees are anxious to make a collection of all pamphlets and other publications, that in any manner relate to the history or politics of this country, before or since the revolution. Several donations of this kind already have been made to the Library, and it is to be hoped that gentlemen who are possessed of such papers will deposit them there, and make them thro' that medium more extensively useful.—Shares in the Library may be had by applying to *Samuel Jones*, Esq. the Treasurer, or to *Rufus King* and *John Cozine*, Esquires, and Mr. *Nathaniel Hazard*, the purchasing committee of the Library.

An anonymous communication, "On the Utility of Public Libraries," in *The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository*, for June, 1791, after expatiating on the rebound in civic affairs after the Revolution, says: "The cause of science and literature at length arrested the public attention, nor has the call been in vain. A handsome subscription list was obtained, which has enabled the Trustees of the New-York Society Library to form a collection of upwards of *four thousand volumes*, within *two years*."

From these statements it is clear that the institution's



renewed start had been timely and successful. Before proceeding to the next topic of chronological importance, the erection of a building, let us direct brief attention to new names on the board.

General Jacob Morton, who served the Library as Secretary for a year, and as financial manager of the new building, was a conspicuous figure of his day. Of an honorable military record, a master mason of high degree, and a trustee of the Presbyterian Church, he busied himself further in all worthy movements and objects, such as the Humane Society, the new public school system and, in particular, the Erie Canal project. One of the notables in attendance at the jubilee to mark its opening, he had shown his interest years before, in presenting to the city a great porcelain punch-bowl, thus inscribed: "Drink deep. You will preserve the City and encourage Canals."<sup>1</sup> He was himself at one time a member of the Corporation as alderman, and for years city clerk, and, in a word, "of most pleasant memory for his many kindnesses and virtues."<sup>2</sup>

Easily one of the most remarkable men in the history of New York city is little enough distinction to ascribe to the name of John Pintard. Of gentle birth, carefully brought up, a graduate of Princeton and an associate always of the most cultivating persons and authors, naturally thoughtful and generous and of wide interests, he seems to have consecrated his talents to the welfare and amelioration of fellow-citizens. Even after the loss of a large fortune, whose income had been freely ex-

<sup>1</sup> This bowl, bearing date of July 4, 1812, was plainly intended also to commemorate the opening of the present City Hall, where it may

be seen to-day in the Governor's Room.

<sup>2</sup> Charles King. *Progress of the City of New York* (1801-1851). New York, 1852. P. 36.

pendent in the service of his country, he was ever able to command the resources of others in support of his plans. His long life covered more than the period of transition from the narrower limits of colonial days to the great expansion that set in with the opening of the Erie Canal. Gifted with the insight of a seer, he discerned the people's needs in advance, and he was furthermore so eminently practical that he usually set the wheels of new enterprises in motion himself, sharing in their operation for a longer or shorter time.

His passion for service was first shown as a lad of seventeen, fresh from college, where he had ardently espoused the patriot cause. As deputy to his uncle, Lewis Pintard, commissary of prisoners, he was touched by their sufferings and placed his property at the disposal of the Continental authorities, whom he further aided in translating French despatches. His native city he was glad to serve as an inspector, as alderman and as assemblyman.

But his real work lies beyond all this. There truly seems to have been no useful or philanthropic enterprise or organization in his day that he did not either suggest or stoutly champion. A leading sachem of the St. Tammany Society,—as originally called, when its objects were solely charitable,—he established its American Museum, for the preservation and display of curiosities relating to our history, natural or political, and was instrumental in the founding of the Sailors' Snug Harbor, the American Bible Society, the General Theological Seminary, the Society for the Relief of the Destitute, and the public school system, in all of which he was chosen a director and usually secretary.

In the world of affairs he is said to have been the first

licensed New York broker. He was one of the organizers of the first fire insurance company, the Mutual (later the Knickerbocker), and its secretary for twenty years; he was of great assistance in securing a charter for the Bank of New York; upon his suggestions and ideas was founded the first savings bank in New York, of which he was president for over a score of years; while for a decade he acted as secretary to the Chamber of Commerce. De Witt Clinton found in him, always his warm friend, a tower of strength in furthering the Erie Canal project against the heavy odds of popular disapproval. One of the noblest and most enduring monuments to his genius and public spirit, however, is the New York Historical Society, of which he is justly venerated as the founder.

In addition to all these labors he read extensively in various lines of literature, and has left voluminous journals of his doings and opinions. Until these diaries, together with his immense correspondence, now somewhat scattered, shall be assorted and edited, the true history of New York for the great period from the Revolution to 1825 can not be fully studied or written. John Pintard's services to the Society Library were not confined to a trusteeship covering ten years and including the inevitable secretaryship; he was ever active in its behalf, and up to the time of his death was constantly adding to its treasures.

The Hon. Rufus King is too well-known a character in national annals to require many words of biography here. A simple enumeration of his honors and dignities would at once proclaim him one of the foremost men of his day. A son of New England and of Harvard, with some war experiences, he represented the old Bay State

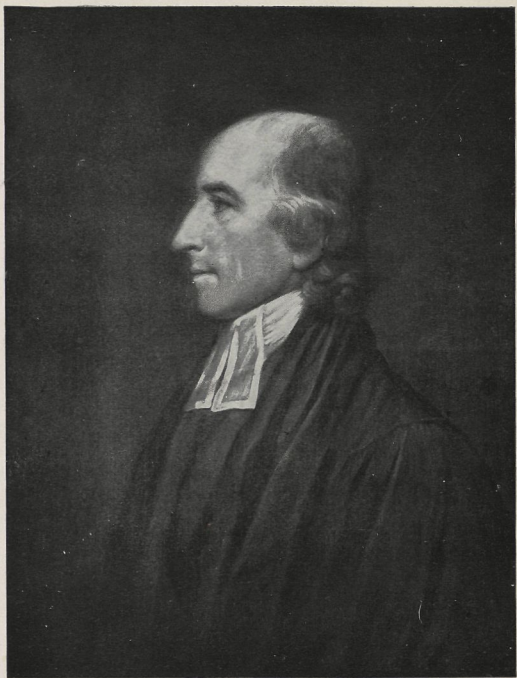


in Congress during the "critical period," where a resolution of his became the basis of the famous Ordinance of 1787, prohibiting slavery in the northwest territory; and he was also a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of that same year.

Upon his subsequent removal to New York, his ability met with ready appreciation, the legislature electing him one of the state's first two senators, an office he was repeatedly chosen to fill. Interspersed with these honors came appointments as minister to the Court of St. James's and nominations by the Federalist party for the governorship and the presidency in turn. Yet amid the distractions of his great career he found time to identify himself with many charitable and literary interests, serving as a warden of Trinity parish and showing particular interest in its charity school.

In striking contrast to this man of large public affairs, appears the gentle and benignant personality of the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Moore, later consecrated second bishop of New York, and for a number of years rector of Old Trinity, a large part of the same time holding also the presidency of Columbia College. From all accounts he was a preacher of rare simplicity, and a man of saintlike life and appearance. His usefulness to the Library embraced fifteen years, during which term he was often called upon to preside as chairman and to give the benefit of his scholarly taste in the selection of books.

In Nathaniel Hazard and John Cozine, Esq., again are found opposites in calling, though identical in devotion to the Library. The former had for years a large business as commission merchant in woollens. It is said of him that he sold not merely for cash, but for



Rt. Rev. Benjamin Moore, D.D., S.T.D.  
Trustee, 1791-1792; 1797-1811





"cash to be paid at the time the goods were delivered to the buyer"!<sup>1</sup> The latter gentleman was a lawyer of eminence, dying just when promoted to a judgeship on the state supreme bench. He is described by President Duer as "a good off-hand-case lawyer," who "appeared more at home at *Nisi Prius* than at Bar," and who, as an advocate, "stood foremost in the second rank."<sup>2</sup> At the time of his death Mr. Cozine was a trustee of Columbia College as well as of the Society Library.

The last individual of this review is one whom the nation delighted to honor. This personage is none other than a military hero of international renown—General Frederick William Augustus, Baron Steuben. A native Prussian, serving on the staff of the great Frederick in the Seven Years' War, on its conclusion he began a tour of investigation in the interests of military science. Attracted to America by the outbreak of the Revolution, he threw in his lot with the "rebels" as a volunteer. Soon appointed inspector-general with the rank of major-general, he participated in battle under both Lafayette and Washington. His manual of arms, adopted by Congress, introduced thorough discipline into the army. The resolutions of appreciation and tracts of land voted him by several states, as also an annuity by the Government, prove that republics are not always ungrateful.

<sup>1</sup> *Old Merchants of New York*. N. Y., 1885. Vol. III, pp. 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> William A. Duer. *Reminiscences of an Old Yorker*. New York, 1867. P. 25.

## V

### PROGRESS, 1791-1804; THE FIRST LIBRARY BUILDING IN NEW YORK, 1795

**F**ROM the first, as will be recalled, it had been the hope and expressed intention of the Society Library to establish itself in a home of its own. For obvious reasons this purpose had been found impracticable hitherto. But at last, with a collection and a membership both larger than ever before, and constantly gaining, the prospects were certainly bright for the erection of a building, a proceeding especially authorized by charter.

The subject finds earliest mention in the minutes under date of September 29, 1791, in an offer from Brockholst Livingston of land "to build a Library-hall upon." Its title proving defective, however, the Trustees did not "suppose it proper to accept of the said Gift." In May following, a committee was deputed to ascertain the availability and price of "the Lott belonging to the Lutheran Church," then situated on the corner of Frankfort and William streets, and commonly known as the "Swamp Church"; but presently reported it as "not to be purchased upon any consideration."

Thereupon Messrs. Hazard, Cozine, Childs and Edward Livingston were requested "to enquire for a

suitable Lott," and in September, 1792, they reported an agreement "to take of Miss Joanna Livingston a Lott of Ground in Wall Street in possession of M<sup>r</sup> Michael Huck<sup>1</sup> on a Lease for ever, paying the first Year from the first day of May next Fifty Pounds, and Seventy Pounds per Annum for ever thereafter, she taking two shares in the Library at Six pounds each in part payment of the first year's rent." The Treasurer was at once asked to submit a draft of conveyance.

Other proceedings at the same time reveal clearly the enthusiasm and determination aroused. Edward and Brockholst Livingston, General Morton and Israel Wilkes were instructed to submit plans "for the Library and an estimate of the expence"; while Messrs. Hazard, E. Livingston and Morton were to solicit funds "for the purposes of building," with authority "to fix a period after which the subscriptions should be raised from 15 to 20 Dollars," only a limited number thus to be sold.

Some uneasiness, however, soon arose over the size of the proposed lot; and in February, 1793, "it appearing that on an actual admeasurement" it really was too small, the agreement was broken, Miss Livingston cheerfully canceling the lease. This amiable lady was a sister of Robert R. and Edward Livingston, and thus, as daughter of a founder, had an hereditary interest in the Library. She may have been one of the guests mentioned in Washington's diary as dining with him on the first New Year's Eve of his presidency, for among them were "Chan'r Livingston, lady and sister."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the directory for 1792 he lived at 55 Wall street and had a livery stable at no. 5 Wall. The next year his place of business was the same, but he had moved to 56 Smith street, so it would seem

that the lot in question, if either, was no. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *The Diary of George Washington* (Oct. 1, 1789, to June 1, 1791). Edited by Benson J. Lossing. New York, 1860. In October, 1805, Miss



Renewed inquiry resulted in finding two locations, "the one Situate in Nassau Street belonging to Joseph Winter & the other in Broad Street at the Corner of Verlitenbergh," the latter, Verlittenberg street, now known as Exchange place. To think of the Library on that spot under present conditions is indeed amusing; while its ownership of the lot to-day would awaken sentiments still more pleasurable! In March, 1793, the board decided to take the former lot in perpetual lease at a rent of £70 a year, "according to his proposal"; and in April the indenture of lease and a personal agreement were signed and sealed. Their terms were strictly observed until June, 1811,<sup>1</sup> when the Trustees bought the land of Mr. Winter, a well-known lawyer.

The building committee—General Morton and Edward and Brockholst Livingston—was authorized to draw upon the Treasurer for any sum not exceeding £2000, an amount about equal to \$5000 in New York currency. Just when ground was broken, or to whom the contracts were awarded, the minutes do not tell; though General Morton's receipt book shows forty-odd entries of disbursements for work and materials, aggregating £883:3:7½ (a little over \$2200), from July, 1793, to April, 1795. No doubt a start was made at once, for in December an annoying set-back was reported, in "part of the Library Hall having fallen." The committee was thereupon ordered to "suspend further finishing of the Library—after the Roof be put on—& that Materials be put within the building & the same be properly secured."

Some months pass in silence until June, 1794, when Livingston was married at Clermont, the "lower manor," to a distant rela-

tive, the Hon. Peter R. Livingston of New York city.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 308-309.

the building was ordered "finished in a square form instead of an Oval as formerly proposed." Shortage of funds beginning to hamper the committee, in October Mr. Gaine was detailed to borrow \$750 from the Bank of New York, "for the purpose of finishing the New Library," the board to "indemnify" him to that amount.

Several other resolutions at this last meeting indicate that the long-awaited hour was at hand when the institution would be able to welcome members under its own roof, namely: first, "that one of the front Rooms in the New Library be allowed for the use of the Librarian for the time being"; second, "that M<sup>r</sup>. Jacob Morton be requested to deliver an Oration in the New Library at the time of the opening thereof," and that immediately after its delivery a collection be taken to defray "part of the expences of the building"; third, that an occupant be secured for the lower part of the structure except the room allowed the Librarian; and fourth, that the committee "provide wire network for the book case doors." Librarian Forbes was then requested to submit "a plan for arranging the Books scientifically."

Meanwhile a tenant for the lower rooms had been chosen from several applicants in the person of one John Corman, who "engaged to keep a Coffee Room" there, at a rent of £100 a year. However, either his venture proved unsuccessful, or else the arrangement was found distasteful, for a year later the apartments were "let to Nicholas Fish Esq<sup>r</sup>. as a public Office," at the same rental, "the Cellar and Yard to be in common between him and the Trustees."

But just before the building was occupied, a contested election seems unfortunately to have convulsed the hitherto peaceful surface of affairs. A few days prior

to the annual meeting a gathering of shareholders was called at Hunter's Hotel, "to nominate Trustees for the ensuing year."<sup>1</sup> Some dissatisfaction must have arisen over the work of the building committee, for the ticket then decided upon<sup>2</sup> did not include Edward Livingston and General Morton, its chairman and bursar, respectively. Nor were they reëlected, if indeed nominated by an opposition movement, of which no record has survived. Only three names on the list submitted failed of election, the Rev. Dr. Moore, William Laight and John Watts, the recorder, son of the Hon. John Watts, an original Trustee; and the first two of these were presently returned.

Consequently, when the new structure was eventually thrown open to the public, it is hardly probable that General Morton delivered the oration previously requested of him. The Library minutes are absolutely mute on the subject of any dedicatory exercises at all, as likewise the newspapers—so far as ransacked.

Although the Trustees first met in "the New Library" on April 25, 1795, it was upwards of two months before the collection was there installed. On June 2d the Librarian was ordered "to procure some person to clean and prepair the new Library Room for the reception of the Books of this Society, and that as soon as the said Room is ready he superintend the removal of the Books from the City Hall to the said Room." Librarian Forbes in his turn informed the public, that "from the 6th to the 15th Inst." no books would "be delivered or received," and that in future all such transfers would take place "at the Library in Nassau street, opposite to

<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, April 21-23, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 28, 1795.



the new Dutch Church.”<sup>1</sup> Promptly on the date last named, Mr. Forbes notified the board that the removal had been duly made, at a cost of £5.

Thus came to a close the second and last sojourn of the Society Library in the City Hall.<sup>2</sup> Upon the removal of the Government to Philadelphia in 1790, Federal Hall had received again its old name and its former occupants of state and municipal officialdom, the Library continuing to enjoy the hospitality of the city fathers. In their longer first tenancy of that old building, whose erection dated back to the earliest years of the 18th century, the Trustees had given a partial equivalent, in caring for the defunct Corporation Library, but this second stay just ending had been granted wholly on sufferance by the Common Council. With all due respect to the favor, however, and despite two subsequent instances of similar courtesies offered,—but not accepted because of “conditions,”—such rather negative patronage can hardly be advanced as evidence of encouragement of letters on the part of the civic authorities.

It is indeed only within recent times that anything has been done by the city for the literary advancement of the community. True enough, that beautiful marble temple, now nearing completion on Fifth Avenue, denominated the center of the New York Public Library system, may be pointed out with pride as proof that these interests are now being furthered. Yet, after all, the great work confessedly rests “on the Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.” And far back of these benefac-

<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, June 10, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> In 1805 one Delacoste advertised a “Cabinet of Natural History” in

“the old Library Room in the City-Hall,” by permission of the Common Council. See *Commercial Advertiser*, Feb. 7th.

tors, respectful attention and appreciation are due the noble work wrought in founding the Society Library, and in its successful continuance through those long years of depression and struggle, unaided by private gift or public funds, when it was in fact the only Public Library in New York.

To return to the new building. The lot lay on Nassau street between Liberty (Crown) and Cedar (Little Queen) streets, and was known as no. 16 until 1827, when, upon a readjustment, it became no. 33, where towers to-day the great office building of the National Bank of Commerce. Thanks to the skill of that pioneer in wood engraving, Dr. Alexander Anderson,—as also to the enterprise of A. T. Goodrich the publisher,—a faithful representation of the structure has been preserved. It is shown to have been an edifice of no slight architectural pretensions and finish for the times; and New Yorkers may well have taken satisfaction in the appearance of this home of their loan Library. The library proper occupied the second floor, the high roof allowing a gallery above the long windows, three at each end. Bookcases along the sides, guarded by doors of “wire network,” held the collection, which at the time of removal numbered fully 5000 volumes. Of interest at this point will be the following reminiscences of this first Library building in New York,—as also one of the earliest in America,<sup>1</sup>—from the pen of Philip J. Forbes, son of Librarian John Forbes, and himself Librarian in 1836, when the building was sold:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first building of the Library Company of Philadelphia was erected in 1790; while the original structure of the Redwood Library at Newport has stood since 1750, with harmonious additions. The

Charleston Library Society first occupied a home of its own in 1836.

<sup>2</sup> From an article, “The New York Society Library,” in D. T. Valentine’s *Manual of the Corporation . . . for 1855*. Pp. 578–579.

To those who are fond of recalling the pleasing imagery of the past, it may prove gratifying to retrace some of the lineaments of the locality of the old Library in Nassau street. The building was of brown free-stone, brick interior, with three-quarter Corinthian columns, resting on a projecting basement, on which an ornamental iron balustrade formed a favorite balcony, where the younger frequenters of the Library were fond of viewing the unobstructed scenery of the vicinity, consisting of the garden of Mr. Winter, with its fine grapery and overhanging fruit-trees, the venerable specimen of low Dutch church architecture opposite, whose lofty peaked roof, massive gables, substantial tower, belfry and cupola, surmounted by its gilt *rooster*, still remain, a relic, alas! one of the few, to remind the native Knickerbocker of his childhood's home; to the south-east remained the still more antiquated *Eglise du St. Esprit*, the church of the French Huguenots. Two or three other churches occupied positions in the immediate vicinity, but were not distinctly visible from the Library. The neighborhood, however, was crowded with objects of historical interest, including, besides these ancient churches, with their moss-grown roofs, venerable trees and grassy grave-yards, many a queer old house, with the date of its erection conspicuous in iron numbers on its walls of Holland brick; while a little way down Liberty (formerly Crown) street, hid behind the big Dutch church, lowered that dark and evil-omened pile, the old Sugar-house, or prison of the Revolutionary patriots. The Quaker meeting-house, to which Grant Thorburn with his flower pots afterwards removed from the neighboring corner, was planted behind a high brick wall nearer to Broadway in the same narrow street. The view southward gave a vista of that fine, wide, well-built and handsomely planted avenue, Broad street, then still the leading quarter of the early aristocracy of the town. Such were the immediate aspects and surroundings of the old Library in Nassau street. The tree seen in the sketch, against the Library wall, was a most luxuriant apricot, an object—when its burthened fruitage bowed its branches over the high brick wall in front—of no small desire to the watery-mouthed urchinry, especially when “just let loose” from the neighboring school, on the other side

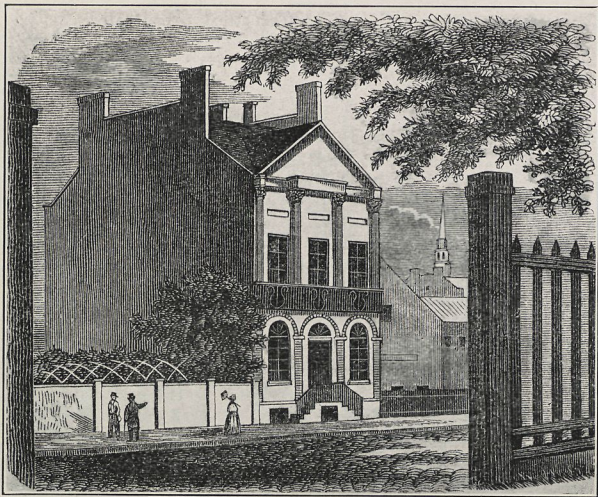


of the Library, by that dreaded disciplinarian, Master Ironside, or that cloaked and hump-backed Richard-looking man, Shepherd. Then, in those early times, when our goodly town still held many a monumental association with the past, long before the mammon of trade had devoured every relic of home, and overlaid us with avalanches of brick and mortar; before the roar of omnibuses and the din of iron-axled carts had begun to stun the ear, there was only heard the hum of an industrious but not an excited community. . . .

The interior of the Library building was homely, but attractive from its intrinsic comforts. Several offices filled its first story, variously occupied from time to time, with a predominance, however, of legal tenantry. The access to the principal floor was by means of a flight of stairs, conspicuously placed in the centre of the building, and forming in fact the leading feature in its structure. This imposing peculiarity, which by-the-by seems to have been reverently observed as a model for future edifices dedicated to the same liberal objects, monopolized the best part of two stories, and contributed not a little towards impressing the public with a high sense of the importance of the place they were approaching. In fact one of the worthy contrivers of this remarkable trait in the Library architecture was wont to express, although jocularly, his consciousness of the achievement, by terming the ascent, as he came somewhat exhausted to its summit, "*The Hill of Science.*" . . .

An earlier memory touch is thus given by Charles King, editor of the *American*, in reviewing the Library Catalogue of 1838:

The writer of this article was once one of those truant youths who passed days and weeks in that silent retreat, unheeding the frequent warnings of the Middle Dutch, that school-time had arrived and passed. We all remember the strict restraint, unwillingly submitted to, imposed upon us during the administration of the elder Mr. Forbes, the father of the present Librarian, in whose first attempts to use the ladder we bore not an unequal part. That gallery was indeed a whispering gallery,



Earliest Library Building in New York, erected 1795

Home of the New York Society Library, 1795–1836

Site of present National Bank of Commerce Building, 33 Nassau Street





for woe to the unlucky wight whose voice exceeded the bounds of a fearful murmur.<sup>1</sup>

Last of all may be quoted a sentence or two from a contemporary journal, to put vividly before us the old structure when new, and the usefulness of the institution as well. Dr. Alexander Anderson, better remembered for his engraving talent, as a youth of twenty thus notes in his diary for June 17, 1795: "I went to the Library, in the New Building, and got Lee's Botany"; this he "renewed" on July 6th; and, on the 24th, "Returned Lee's Botany and got Sully's Memoirs from the City Library."<sup>2</sup>

When once settled in the building, very properly the next step in the direction of permanence would be its insurance against fire losses. Accordingly, in January, 1796, Treasurer Phoenix was empowered to insure the structure for £2500 with the Mutual Assurance Company. This amount, in New York currency equivalent to \$6250, was increased to \$9000 by December, 1803; but there is no mention of any insurance on the books or furnishings. Evidences of other, though simpler, measures for safety appear early in two accounts, the one "for 6 fire buckets at 18/," and the second "for a ladder &c, 16/," a small sum being paid for painting buckets.

That the Trustees were not disposed to surrender any part of the funds in their keeping, without due cause and investigation, may be seen in an incident of this year. Mr. Winter presented a demand "for Damage done his fences by the building," a claim Mr. Gaine was deputed to investigate, it "appearing to be more than the real damage done." At the same time, how-

<sup>1</sup> The clipping from which this extract is copied bears no date, but its context establishes the year as 1838.

<sup>2</sup> From a MS. diary of Alexander Anderson, M.D., now in the Library of Columbia University.

ever, punctilious and business-like, the Treasurer was ordered to pay to Mr. Winter "the last year's ground rent of the Library Lot," which the records show was regularly done until the land was acquired in 1811.

Few references to the building are met with in the next eight years, and they relate chiefly to insurance, needed repairs, or "alterations to render the Lower part more convenient." One entry alludes to the wide-spread blight from the yellow fever epidemic, in the Librarian's reporting, December 7, 1803, that he had "on account of the fever shut the Library," from September 14th to November 8th.

Two final allusions to accommodations for the Library during this first half-century of its history occur in April, 1804, the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. But they deal with no plans for any commemorative celebration; rather indeed do they read like a return to first principles. One resolve was for Egbert Benson and William Samuel Johnson "to inquire of the City Corporation whether a Room in the City Hall now building will be allowed to this Society to be used as a Library"; and the other similarly asked them, three weeks later, "to endeavour to procure a Room in the new City Hall to be used as a Library by this Society."

Such action is indeed startling and disappointing. In reviewing the finances, we shall presently see that in erecting the new building the Trustees had gone beyond their depth. With that first loan in 1794 began an indebtedness that was destined to weigh down the advancement of the institution for over sixty years, at times with hopeless obstinacy. That the Library ever recovered from this prostration, let alone continuing the while to perform its contemplated mission, is well-

nigh inconceivable, especially considering the general indifference manifested toward its efforts and needs, and toward its great possibilities for public usefulness.

As to the attempts above recited to secure quarters in the new City Hall, the Common Council minutes record no receipt of any memorial or petition from the Library. Doubtless none was presented, for the simple reason that the corner-stone of that structure, the City Hall of to-day, had been laid only on September 20, 1803; while the edifice was not formally opened until July 4, 1812.

Before considering other matters that in these thirteen years arose to occupy, to interest or to perplex the Trustees, it will be refreshing to turn for a little to the new personalities that had in the meantime been called to participate in the work.

These include first, for brief terms, John Blagge, a former Liberty Boy who settled down into a substantial merchant, a secretary and a vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce; Israel Wilkes, of whom little has been learned, save that he was an original stockholder in the Bank of New York in 1791; and Francis Childs, a printer and founder, in 1785, of the *Daily Advertiser*, New York's first daily paper. It was the second in the country, the *Pennsylvania Packet* having been established less than a year before.

Following them are three names of more distinction, as also of longer periods of usefulness to the Library. William Samuel Johnson, LL.D., Trustee for nine years, was long a power in public affairs. A lawyer by training, a supreme court justice in Connecticut before the Revolution, and immediately afterward a representative in Congress from that state, he was its first senator under the Constitution, which he had helped to



draft. From 1787 to 1800 he was president of Columbia College, of which, as King's College, his father, Dr. Samuel Johnson, had been first president.

Edward Livingston, younger brother of the chancellor, a leader in Congress, Federal district-attorney for New York and mayor of the city, and afterward senator from Louisiana, Secretary of State under President Jackson and minister to France, will be remembered best and longest for his famous codification of the Louisiana penal law.

Charles Wilkes, nephew of the celebrated English agitator, John Wilkes, and uncle of that Charles Wilkes who captured the Confederate envoys in the Civil War, was himself a man of peaceful pursuits. Interested in all that was improving, his services were freely rendered as a trustee of Columbia College, as a founder of the Historical Society, as treasurer of the Greek Fund in 1824, and as Trustee of the Library for more than twenty-six years. His life-work was his forty years' connection, as cashier and president, with the Bank of New York.

Among New York's many representatives on the tented field appear the next two members, Brigadier-General James M. Hughes and Adjutant-General David Van Horne: the former a Liberty Boy, a lawyer of standing, a justice of the peace and master in chancery; the latter one of the old merchants, a member of the Whig Club and an active trustee of the Presbyterian Church. With them began the larger connection of a name as unique in local history as it was well known beyond the city gates—Samuel L. Mitchill, M.D., physician, professor, lecturer, editor, author, founder and member of countless literary, scientific and charitable

societies, member of Congress and United States senator. A man of wide travel, varied learning and marvelous memory, he might be called *information incarnate*, even as he has been styled the Nestor of American science. Yet with all his energy and attainments he ever preserved a rare simplicity of character and tenderness of heart.

A stately figure next advances, martial in bearing and laden with civic dignities no less, the "Dutch mayor," Colonel Richard Varick. An eminent lawyer, recorder of the city, member of assembly and attorney-general, besides holding the mayoralty twelve years,—the longest term in its history,—his military record was equally distinguished, comprising the post of secretary to Generals Schuyler, Arnold and Washington, and earning him the thanks of Congress on retirement. In local concerns he was also a notable participator, as an elder in the Reformed Church, chairman of the Columbia College trustees, an officer of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, a founder and president of the American Bible Society, president of the Merchants' Bank, and for thirty years honored president of the Society of the Cincinnati.

Another name of Revolutionary luster is that of William Denning, a gentleman-merchant of the old school. One of the first to support non-importation, he served on all the local "committees" and in the provincial congress, acting in the war as a captain and as quartermaster-general. His later career included usefulness in both branches of the state legislature and in public service generally, as director in various business enterprises.

Several others were drawn from the ranks of the "old merchants." Daniel Phoenix, another uncompromising Whig and Liberty Boy, though not a participant in the

war, served his community for many years as alderman and city treasurer, at the same time identified with educational and benevolent interests, as with the Chamber of Commerce and the Presbyterian Church. Similarly useful are the records of Daniel McCormick and William Laight, the former being a Whig and a Presbyterian elder and the latter a vestryman of Trinity parish, with loyalist views during the war. Among them it is good to see the name of Thomas Eddy, if only for a single year, for, if ever a man had a passion for serving humanity, it was he. With his kindred spirit, John Pintard, he was active in founding and supporting educational, charitable and reformatory institutions of every description.

Nor were the learned professions overlooked. William Pitt Smith, M.D., son of William Peartree Smith, an original Trustee, was a man of promise, professor in Columbia College, and holding public office, when he fell victim to yellow fever, after less than a year's membership on the Library board. Likewise Dr. Thomas Jones, a brother of another Trustee, Dr. John Jones, and an associate of Dr. Smith on the hospital staff, was removed by death before serving two years as Trustee. Another Trustee who died in office, though after eighteen years' service, was John Kemp, LL.D., professor of mathematics and natural science at Columbia, and also identified with various public concerns. With him on the board was associated his colleague, Dr. Peter Wilson, of the classical department, long an educational factor in the community, and a pillar in the Dutch Church.

The ministry was represented by three of its brilliant members, Dr. William Linn and Dr. John Henry



Livingston of the Reformed communion, and Dr. John M. Mason, pastor of the Scotch Presbyterian Church. Of these the first was distinguished for wide usefulness and influence, as for great personal charm, while his associate was renowned for pulpit eloquence; a founder of the Historical Society, he is also remembered as first chaplain of the Federal Congress. Of equal erudition, and unsurpassed in power as a preacher, was Dr. Mason, who coincidentally held the unique and important office of provost of Columbia College.

Last, there await our respectful attention three members of the bar, than whom none can be held in higher honor, Egbert Benson, William Johnson and James Kent. For many years Judge Benson gave of his time and talents to the welfare of the Library, as also to Columbia College, his alma mater, to the Historical Society, of which he was the first president, and to his duties as an elder in the Dutch Church. He is revered as a devoted patriot and as an eminent jurist, distinguished alike for eloquence and learning.

Full twenty years is the span that marks the term of William Johnson as a Trustee of the Society Library. Equally valuable were his services as vestryman and comptroller of Trinity parish, and as trustee of Columbia College and of the Historical Society. His great achievement was his series of "Reports" of cases and decisions, familiar to every New York lawyer. A man of elevated character, he possessed a decided literary taste, and was the associate of the leading men of letters of his day. To him are dedicated the famous "Commentaries," by his friend, Chancellor Kent, a renowned personage, who truly needs no eulogium here, nor mention of the manifold public positions and honors that were

heaped upon him. His decisions at law cover so wide a range and are so profound, that they are recognized as forming the basis of American equity jurisprudence.

During the years when the Society Library was building and setting its house in order, its Trustees were not unmindful of matters of general routine. In fact they seem to have been more than formerly observant of the needs of the hour and alive to changing conditions. This will appear in a study of their various problems and activities as gathered from the minutes.

The foremost consideration would properly be a judicious increase of the collection. Lists of new books no longer appear upon the records, as in early days. But the issuance of several additional catalogues, between 1791 and 1804, shows that this interest was not neglected. The first of these, published in 1791, is without cover and styled simply "Continuation of the Catalogue [of 1789] of the New-York Society Library," to which it was designed to be attached, as its 28 pages begin at 81. It contains titles of about 700 volumes, arranged alphabetically, with subdivisions under each letter, according to fold. Many titles are in part self-explanatory, as "Irish guardian, a pathetick story, 2 vols."; "Love and madness, a story too true, in a series of letters between parties whose names would perhaps be mentioned were they less known"; or "Kalish revolution, containing observations on man and manners, by Durus, king of Kalikang, who was born in the reign of the emperor Augustus, travelled over most of the globe, and still exists." The last two pages are devoted to the names of "Additional Members"—sixty-six in all.

The next year saw "A Farther Continuation" of both

catalogue and list of shareholders, a pamphlet of 24 pages, numbered from 109 to 131, to be joined with the preceding issue. It contains titles of 816 books in all, including a number "in french," and the names of 188 new members. The first of these supplements bears no name of printer, though conforming to the Gaine Catalogue of 1789. The second, however, which has the titles arranged alphabetically, without regard to folding, is the product of the Messrs. Thomas and James Swords.

This same firm in 1793 published a complete catalogue, whose preface states the collection then to comprise "about FIVE THOUSAND VOLUMES." It was the ambitious aim of the board "to class the books under distinct heads, so as to have presented nearly at one view, all those that relate to any particular subject, art or science." But, owing to exigencies of time and resources, "a more systematical arrangement" was deferred, until opportunity should offer "to execute the same, in a manner more useful to readers of every description." Besides the catalogue of books, this 100-page pamphlet, the largest yet issued, contained the charter, by-laws, list of Trustees elected in 1793, and a full register of members, then numbering 892. It was at just this prosperous time that the lot of Joseph Winter was leased and the building begun.

In December, 1800, William S. Johnson for the purchasing committee reported the publication of 500 copies of "A Supplementary Catalogue," to be sold "for eighteen cents each." Of this issue, as of the others, the Library possesses to-day a single copy. It also bears the imprint of the Messrs. Swords, of whom John Pintard wrote in his diary in August of that year: "They have risen to some degree of wealth by their industry, have



*Samuel Carter*

A  
FARTHER CONTINUATION  
OF THE  
CATALOGUE OF BOOKS  
BELONGING TO THE  
NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY,  
WITH THE  
N A M E S  
OF THE  
ADDITIONAL MEMBERS  
OF THE SAID SOCIETY.



NEW-YORK:  
Printed by *Thomas & James Swords*, at their Printing-Office,  
No. 27, William-Street; where PRINTING in ge-  
neral is executed with Neatness, Accuracy and  
Dispatch, and on reasonable Terms.

—1792.—

two printing presses & 6 or 8 hands, with more work to execute than they can perform; they are the neatest & most correct printers on the continent." At this time Thomas Swords, the senior partner, was a member of the Library, on whose board of Trustees the family has twice been represented, his nephew, Charles R. Swords, serving from 1855 to 1876, while Treasurer Henry C. Swords, a grandson, has been a Trustee since November, 1901.

This supplement, which contained "a full and satisfactory account of the titles" added since 1793, or about 748 volumes, is arranged like earlier catalogues, but with a new feature in an appendix for "Novels, Adventures, &c." Some of the additions had been imported, as in the early days, and others had been bought of local dealers. By 1800, then, twelve years after the institution was reëstablished, its collection comprised nearly 6000 volumes.

With reference to the collection itself, rulings were made as to "what books were improper" for circulation; and, in consequence of some choice illustrations having been cut out, a list for reference only was bulletined, consisting of "Maps of every description," and works in architecture, geography, travel, and biography, as also "the whole sett" of British and French encyclopedias. With regard to lost or injured books, the rule called for a new copy or its money value; while, in the case of a volume lost from a set, the borrower was expected to supply a new set, or to pay for the whole set and receive the remaining volumes. At the same time, if any member, "injuring or losing a book," should himself feel "injured" at the penalty imposed, he might "appeal to the Trustees."

An instance savoring of grace occurred in May, 1799, when Dr. Samuel Bard—no longer a Trustee—reported that he “had taken from the Library the first volume of Rollin’s Ancient History, and that the book was put on board a Sloop, and that the Sloop up set in the River, whereby the said book was lost,” and the board ordered him to pay one dollar “for the book he has lost.” At this same meeting, Edward Livingston confronted the board with the statement “that he had some time since subscribed for a Copy of Lavater’s Essay on Physiognomy for the Library,” as yet unpaid for. He was met with the cool reply that, “as it does not appear to the board that he had any authority to subscribe for books on account of this Society, they think it inexpedient to receive the said Copy of Lavater or to pay therefor.”

Occasionally gifts are recorded, as in May, 1792, when acknowledgment was voted to Thomas Barrow “for his polite donation of the portrait of M<sup>r</sup> Howard and the sketch of his life”; while, at the same time, “M<sup>r</sup> Morton presented to the Library Douglass’s summary which was accepted with thanks.” In April, 1802, appreciation was expressed to Judge Benson for “copies of most of the editions of the Laws of this state.” Then also was acknowledged the first in the long series of gifts from Gulian C. Verplanck, “a Book entitled ‘A View of London and its Environs.’ ”

Closely allied in importance to the matter of books were the duties and the choice of a Librarian. Isaac L. Kip, who succeeded the Rev. George Wright in 1790, was a lawyer, later the partner of Brockholst Livingston. He served as clerk in chancery under three successive chancellors, and figured prominently in the affairs of the Reformed Church, as also in the state



militia. His salary as Librarian, however, finds no mention in the minutes until May, 1793, when it was fixed at \$250, together with fines. A year later, upon his resignation, John P. Pearss held the appointment for just one month, until, in June, 1794, John Forbes began his thirty years of service. Mr. Pearss, who had failed of reappointment only by a vote of five to four, was "allowed at the rate of £150 per Annum during the time he kept the Library," while Mr. Forbes was voted, "for his Salary as Librarian and Secretary," £100 a year with fines. He was also "to collect the annual Subscriptions & be allowed therefor 2½ per Cent." As stated above, he was also given for his own use the front room on the ground floor of the new building, which apartment three years later he was permitted "to let, rent or otherwise dispose of." The duties of Secretary were for a time combined with the treasurership, then for some years detached, and from 1792 to 1815 united with the office of Librarian.

Another topic of importance relates to times when the collection was available. It must be borne in mind that this was long before a Library was thought of as a place for all-day reading or for prolonged reference. The hours for drawing books were still few and far apart; yet frequent alterations, in even the simple schedule then maintained, show a regard on the part of the authorities for public convenience.

In November, 1789, the time had been from 12 to 2 P.M., Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. But in 1791 the Library was open *daily*, at the same hours. The year 1793 saw several changes. In March the time was fixed from 10 to 2 o'clock, Librarian Kip being voted £30 extra therefor. Again, from May to September

the hours were from 11 to 2 and from 4 to 7, daily, Saturday afternoons excepted. Lastly, they were from 9 to 12 and from 2 to 5, a rule in force until May, 1800, when they became 9 to 2, daily, Sundays and holidays always excepted.

Throughout its history, a distinctive feature of the Society Library has been the title of Chairman, as applied to the presiding officer of the Trustees. Since 1856 this position, filled by each year's board upon organization, has been of annual tenure, but prior to that date a chairman was chosen at each meeting. Yet it is not till September, 1791, that the term first appears in the minutes, following the name of Samuel Jones, the last of the eight members present. The next July it is written "Doctor Johnson in the Chair," and thereafter the office is intermittently entered in one way or another, until May, 1794, after which, under the latter form, it becomes an established part of the heading. During the years from 1791 to 1804, William Samuel Johnson oftenest served in this capacity.

A vital function of membership in the Society Library is the privilege of voting at the annual meeting of shareholders, on such matters as may arise for action, besides electing Trustees. Some laxity with regard to the voting and the payment of arrears led the board in February, 1793, to adopt an elaborate and stringent by-law, regulating the election of Trustees, which was spread upon the minutes and printed, both in the new catalogue and in two newspapers, *The Diary; or Loudon's Register* and *The Daily Advertiser*. It ordained, briefly:

1st, that all elections be by ballot on the last Tuesday in April in the Library room from ten to four; 2d, that the Secretary give at least two weeks' notice in two newspapers, and affix a like

notice on the "outward door" of the room; 3d, that elections be held under inspection by three Trustees, the Secretary to keep a poll list under "their direction and view," and the said inspectors to preside over the election as returning officers; 4th, that every qualified voter hand in his ballot, "a paper ticket containing the names of as many persons for Trustees as then to be chosen, or as many of them as such elector shall think proper to vote for"; 5th, that the inspectors on closing the poll at once "canvass and estimate the Votes," and sign a certificate of those elected Trustees, the same to be laid before the board, "whose duty it shall be to assemble at the Library room at Seven o'Clock in the evening" of that day; 6th, that no minor be eligible to serve as Trustee; 7th, that only certified shareholders, not in arrears, could vote, no member to have more than one vote or to vote by proxy; 8th, that, in case of the death, resignation or removal of a Trustee, an election be held at a time appointed by the Trustees.

Naught appearing to prove the contrary, these rules were scrupulously observed. This can be assumed only, in the case of the fourth and seventh sections, as they need contemporary confirmation for absolute certitude. But as no complaint of illegality was registered during this period, the assumption may be pronounced assurance. With regard to the other divisions of the ordinance, ample verification is furnished by the minutes, supplemented by insertions in the current press.

Variation in time of holding meetings seems to have suited the Trustees. In November, 1793, they voted to meet "in future regularly on the first Tuesday." This was changed in February, 1797, to "the first Wednesday of every month at 4 o'Clock in the afternoon," and six months later it was again amended to read "that the future monthly meetings be held at any time on the first Wednesday." Lastly, in May, 1803, the date was moved to "the second Tuesday of every month."



As must long have been noted, the board worked through committees appointed in open meeting. Their reports were similarly acted upon, as were also petitions or other communications. In a word, then, the mode of procedure was identical with that now obtaining, save that there were no standing committees.

Now and then a Trustee had died in office, whereupon the board appointed his successor at its next meeting. For example, in December, 1798, Charles Wilkes, a former Trustee, and Peter Wilson were chosen to fill out the unexpired terms of Thomas Jones and John Cozine, deceased. These selections were ratified, so to speak, at the annual election following, both men being destined to long terms of service. In the case of Dr. Samuel Bard, however, unanimously appointed in March, 1796, to round out the term of Dr. William P. Smith, deceased, a reëlection was probably not desired, for he had given time and thought to the institution during his best years and certainly merited an honorable retirement. No doubt, however, the attention gave him considerable satisfaction, though he does not appear to have attended a single meeting.

By-laws bearing on the forfeiture of rights were enforced, as for instance in January, 1802, when, on the request of three persons,—whose shares “had become forfeited because the annual payments had not been made within the time limited by the Charter,”—“to be informed how much they must pay to become members again,” certificates were ordered issued to them, “on their paying to the Treasurer a sum equal to what would have been due at this time had their shares not have become forfeited.”

Cases are also recorded of certificates being issued for

*To all to whom these Presents shall come:*

*The Trustees of the New-York Society Library send Greeting:*

**K**NOW YE, That the said Trustees have elected and chosen, and DO hereby admit *The Rev. John H. Livingston* —————

to be a MEMBER of the said Society, and that *he* is entitled to *one* Share in the Property thereof. —

IN TESTIMONY whereof, the said Trustees have caused their Common Seal to be hereunto affixed, this

*first* ——— Day of *May* ——— in the Year of our LORD One Thousand Seven Hundred

and *Fourth*.

*Samuel Jones* Treasurer.

By Order of the Trustees,

*Edw. Guesisold* Secretary.





an equivalent of the price, as likewise where such offers were declined. In March, 1793, "Bankes Geography being offerd for a share in the Library with the addition of 20/, *orderd* that the same be received," and "Chambers Dictionary being offerd by M<sup>r</sup> Rhineland for Shares, *orderd* that the same be received at Sterling Price." Again, in May, 1799, when "M<sup>r</sup> Alexander Tiebout offered to sell to the Trustees 'Voyage Pictorisque dans le Grec' for which they may think it worth," two shares were voted him for the work, plus "the payment in addition thereto of ten Dollars,"—a share then selling for \$20. But in April, 1797, on "an Application of D. Fraser's to become a member of this Society (in consideration of certain books offered by him)," the board decreed that they "were not of sufficient value."

Furthermore, shares were made a medium of exchange for work done, as well as for books received. In February, 1797, it appears that one Thomas Allen had been given shares in return for rebinding books. In concluding the subject, it should be stated that shares had all along been transferable, a resolve of September, 1792, directing that four shillings be paid to the Secretary at each transfer, "the one half of which to go to the Library, the other half to the Treasurer & Secretary."

Successive fluctuations in the price of shares will be of interest, as indexing somewhat the varying fortunes of the institution. Originally, and for more than thirty-five years, the cost of a right was fixed at £5, or \$12.50 in New York currency. In October, 1791, it was advanced to \$15. Again, in March, 1793,—the zenith of the Library's prosperity for its first century of existence,—the figure became \$20. The reason for this

advance is explained in the following extract from the *Daily Gazette*, of February 6th: "The present yearly income will admit of an increase of 1000 volumes per annum. From the encouragement the Trustees have received, they have reason to expect to increase their Capital by an elegant and commodious Hall, in Wall-street, and the subscriptions on shares, so as to enrich the Library with near 2000 volumes per annum." The *Journal & Patriotic Register* for February 27th, in announcing the impending rise, says: "*Its present income increases this accumulating capital stock nearly twenty-five per cent. per annum.*" The capstone was set in a resolution of May 7th, that for the future no share should be sold for less than \$20.

Alas for expectations and bright prospects, the heavy expenses of building entailed a mortgage, effectually preventing the anticipated "increase of 1000 volumes per annum," and within a few years the membership of nearly 900, in 1793, became much reduced. Foreseeing stringency, the board voted, in January of that year, to petition the legislature for a "donation," but nothing came of it. Two years later, as a transparent hint for an appropriation, "the use of the Library"—still in the City Hall—was offered to the state legislators, then holding session in the same edifice, before the removal of the capital to Albany, in 1797. No response forthcoming, in March the Trustees applied again fruitlessly, for "the loan or Gift of a Sum of Money," to aid them in finishing the building. Thus the representatives of the interests of the whole state seem to have been as impervious to the cause of letters as the Common Council, and the stand then taken—whether avowedly or not—has been consistently main-

tained by both bodies, so far as the Society Library is concerned.

A formal accounting was called for in June, 1795, in the appointment of Messrs. Phoenix and Cozine and Messrs. Denning and Phoenix, respectively, "to collect the accounts of the different Booksellers," and "to collect and arrange the accounts of the Expenditure and Debts of this Corporation in consequence of the new Library."

Six months later both reports were rendered, the first stating "the accounts due to the different Booksellers" to amount to £226:2:7, and the other that £244:0:5<sup>1</sup> was the "Amount of accounts due . . . on acc<sup>t</sup> of the building." The board promptly authorized Messrs. Gaine, Phoenix and Denning "to borrow £500 (if to be procured at 5 per Cent.)," to pay these items.

In January, 1796, Daniel Phoenix, lately appointed Treasurer, reported "further Sums due to sundry persons," amounting to £897:17:4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>,<sup>1</sup> "the whole that has yet come to Knowledge." Staggered by these figures, "appearing [to] amount to more than was supposed," the Treasurer was empowered to borrow from the Bank of New York \$3000 at five per cent., to pay the debts. A bond for this sum "having been prepared by M<sup>r</sup>. Cozine," it was approved, sealed and delivered to Mr. Phoenix to secure the loan. In March he reported its accomplishment; the loan, originally for a year, was renewed and continued till 1836. Thus began the long lane of indebtedness whose turning was not to be visible for so many years.

Desired relief not appearing, in February, 1797, the

<sup>1</sup> The various items, as entered in the minutes, do not match the total, which is probably correctly copied.



board resolved to petition the legislature for a law, enabling them to raise the annual charges from ten shillings (\$1.25) "to any sum not exceeding twenty shillings." Accordingly the petition was "prepared," sealed and forwarded to Samuel Jones, then a state senator at Albany, by William S. Johnson, chairman of the meeting.<sup>1</sup>

The document is spread on the minutes, as also are the senate resolution and the concurrent action by the assembly, dated March 6th and 7th, respectively, authorizing the Trustees "to present to either house at their next session a Bill for increasing the annual Tax or Assessment upon the Proprietors," after observing certain conditions as to advertising their intention, "to the end that all persons interested in the premises may shew cause . . . why the prayer of the said petition should not be granted."

Whether these conditions were fulfilled or not, the minutes do not record, nor whether pressure was brought to bear upon the legislators by hostile shareholders. For some reason the project failed and for nearly five years is unmentioned in the records. At last, in January, 1802, at a special meeting, Dr. Johnson read a petition similar in all respects to the other, and William Denning was asked to present it to the legislature at once. This time there was no untoward obstacle, for in April the Secretary reported that a law had been passed on March 8th to raise the annual payment "to any sum not exceeding" \$2.50. With all speed the Trustees issued

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Johnson's letter, enclosing this petition, is in the possession of the Library, having been presented in November, 1904, by Librarian Emeritus Butler, to whom it was

given by William Alfred Jones, A.M., late of Norwich, Conn., Librarian of Columbia College, 1851-1883, son of David S. Jones and grandson of Samuel Jones.

an ordinance raising the annual dues to that figure, beginning on May 1st following.

Some time before this, in December, 1799, in its perplexity the board had assigned to Messrs. Kemp, Gaine and William Johnson a task "to devise ways and means for encreasing the funds of this Society," and had recommended that the same gentlemen sell an additional number of shares at \$20 each. Four months later they reported as "not yet compleated, any Plan . . . to encrease the Funds," but that they hoped soon to suggest a measure which "must improve the Resources of the Library." The other Trustees seem to have been equally sanguine, or at any rate unwilling prematurely to spoil the fruit of their colleagues' careful deliberations, for the committee was continued after the annual election, a few weeks later. Finally came justification of their confidence, just one year lacking a day from the original appointment, in a profound opinion delivered by the learned Professor Kemp, "that, if members were allowed to take out from the Library sets of books instead of a single volume at a time, it would not only be a great conveniency to the present members, but would also be a great inducement for other persons to become members of this Society and thereby increase its funds."

No sooner had the Trustees listened to these sagacious words than they at once acted upon the counsel in a resolve to allow members "to take from the Library at one time one folio volume or one quarto, or three octavo volumes (when belonging to the same set and all on the same subject), or six duodecimo volumes (of the same set and relating to the same subject), on each share he or she may hold in the Library." If Nassau street was thereupon crowded with persons, some hurry-

ing to purchase new rights and others moving off with armfuls of "sets," the phenomenon was unmentioned by the newspapers, while the Library records reveal no apparent appreciation of this rare opportunity on the part of the public.

Before leaving the consideration of this early period, a few cullings of a more miscellaneous character will prove entertaining. In view of the present efficient mail service, and as dimly suggesting the admirable messenger system now maintained by the Society Library, it is of interest to learn that in May, 1793, it was voted "that the penny post be paid 40/. for his trouble in Carrying the Letters to the members of the Library."<sup>1</sup>

In previous chapters<sup>2</sup> the origin of the Society Library's first two bookplates has been narrated. Scarcely fuller data are at hand concerning the third than of the second,—simply two items in the Librarian-Secretary's report of February, 1797, as follows: "A. Robertson for a design for a plate for Books, £1:12:0"; and "Peter Maverick for 500 plates for Books, £1:13:9."<sup>3</sup>

What at first sight looks like an attitude anything but liberal was a vote of May, 1792, that it was "inexpedient

<sup>1</sup>The Session records of the Presbyterian Church show that in November, 1787, "a charge was brought against Hugh Duncan the pennypost, that he is addicted to drink." Expressing due contrition, he was restored to the fold; so he may be this very individual.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 166-167, 213-214.

<sup>3</sup>This third bookplate is thus described in Charles D. Allen's *American Book-Plates*, pp. 255-256: "*New York Society Library*. Pictorial. The interior of the library is shown; Minerva [Athena], helmeted, and with spear resting against her arm, leans upon a pillar; before her, in

obseisance, an American Indian, half draped, with tomahawk under his foot, receives from the hand of the gracious goddess a book. The well-filled shelves of the library are disclosed behind them, as the drawn curtain, upheld by cords, lets the sunlight stream in. This view is contained within an oval frame which rests upon a pedestal bearing on its face the name of the library; the whole is filled out to the edges of the plate by a background representing a brick wall. Signed, *Engd. by P. R. Maverick 65 Liberty Street*. A large painting of this design hangs in the library at present."



to grant the Petition of M<sup>r</sup> Abeel . . . requesting permission to have the use of the Library to compile the history of the City & State of New York." Who this gentleman was, it is hard to tell. In that year the membership roll included two of the name, Garret Abeel, for whom the city directory gives no occupation, and Garret B. Abeel, ironmonger, both living at no. 28 Cherry street. The only other Abeels were David, mariner, David G., keeper of the city dispensary, and James, merchant. If not the first-named of these five it may have been the Rev. Dr. John N. Abeel, son of James, a native of New York and later a resident of the city as pastor of the Dutch Church, though at that time a tutor at Princeton.

The refusal, therefore, may have been due to the petitioner's not being a shareholder, or perhaps to the fact that the idea of prolonged research was as yet too new to be acceptable to the board. The investigator may have asked to spend more time in the building than the hours warranted, and, as has been said, there was then little inducement to use the collection for reference work. But, inasmuch as the proposed book seems never to have been published, if indeed ever written, one may well query whether such action did not perhaps discourage a work of promise. In all likelihood valuable material would have been collected and evidence sifted, to the gain of later historians.

In January, 1799, the Library for the first time received a communication from a kindred institution in a proposal of the Library Company of Baltimore to present to Congress a petition for the passage of a law, "allowing public Libraries to import Books, Maps and Charts free from Duty." The Hon. William Johnson

# ***Bibliotheca Provincialis Americana***

*Being the Registers of Books sent  
Forwards Laying the Foundation  
of five new provincial Libraries  
in Imitation of that of Annapolis in*

***Mary Land***

*For the Use and Benefit of the Clergy  
and others in the Provinces of*

*New England } Carolina  
New York }  
Pennsylvania } Bermuda*

***Vol II***

***By THOMAS BRAY DD.***

presenting the draft of such petition, it was approved, signed and sealed, and ordered "transmitted to Edward Livingston Esq<sup>r</sup> at Philadelphia . . . to be laid before Congress."

This movement originated at a meeting of the Directors of the Library Company of Baltimore, December 19, 1798, in a resolution "to correspond with the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia concerning the propriety & expediency of Petitioning Congress to take off the imposts upon books imported for public Libraries, & concerning the best mode of making such application."<sup>1</sup> The records of the latter organization testify that on January 22, 1799, "a letter from the Directors of the Library Company of Baltimore was read, requesting the Directors of this institution to join them in a petition to Congress for an exemption from duty on books imported for these and similar institutions,"<sup>2</sup> which was agreed upon and the enclosed petition, with their signatures added, was ordered presented to the House of Representatives.

In the case of both institutions, this is the first and last reference to the subject in their minutes of proceedings. The journals of Congress contain no allusion to the matter at all, even the receipt of the petitions being ignored. As for the exemption desired, it was not until 1816 that "philosophical apparatus, instruments, books, maps," etc., etc., were put on the free list when intended "for the use of any society incorporated for philosophical or literary purposes, or for . . . any seminary of learning."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the MS. minutes of the Directors of the Library Company of Baltimore.

<sup>2</sup> From the MS. minutes of the

Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup> *U. S. Statutes at Large*, vol. III, p. 313; Act passed April 27, 1816.



From this review of the management of the Society Library in all phases, the reader must be impressed not merely with the great amount of detail involved but chiefly with the disinterestedness and singleness of purpose shown by these devoted Trustees. Serving as they did quite without emolument, and animated by no selfish aim to enhance the capital of a corporation of which they were directors, they are indeed representatives of that desirable type of personal responsibility and fidelity to duty in public service. In character and achievement they were of the best element of our citizenship, as a hasty glance at their careers will show. After all, however, no eulogy can more eloquently stimulate or more thoroughly convince than this detailed study of their patient, earnest, unassuming stewardship.

## VI

1804-1829

**T**HE fiftieth anniversary of founding the Society Library passed without notice. If any demonstration was urged at all, the laconic records suggest no hint of it. One must bear in mind that the people had not then largely taken to holding exercises of a commemorative character. The country was still too young to realize a history of any depth; its laborers were too few and its harvests too great for much giving thought to the past. Yet the sentiment was there, voicing itself in celebrating the Fourth of July and the purely local Evacuation Day; while in this very year the New York Historical Society was established and soon began its long series of public observances of great events.

The American of to-day knows how he would have stirred up such an interest in the time-honored institution, through general exercises expressive of the noble foundation and long usefulness of the Library, as well as its historic associations with the community, that it would at once have been relieved of all financial embarrassment! It is probable, however, that public opinion of that age would have regarded any such move as an

unrighteous display of self-glorification. Quite the contrary; the minutes show an unusual lack of attention on the part of the Trustees for several years ensuing.

But in 1810 came the deluge. In consequence of the awakening then caused, more than nine pages in the big book of minutes—as much as for the whole five years before—are taken up with the proceedings of that year's board. Thereafter closer attention was demanded and gained, though the records, aside from full financial reports, are very sketchy, especially in comparison with the voluminous entries of later years. All through this period, and up to the close of 1832, the same volume was used that begins with the charter in 1772.

During the quarter-century now under consideration, not quite a score of new personalities were introduced into the management of the Library's affairs, or at a rate of less than one a year. Long terms of service were the rule, the average for the thirty-two gentlemen identified with any part of this epoch being nearly sixteen years. While it must be admitted that the extraordinary length of Gulian C. Verplanck's tenure—about fifty-eight years—would offset many a fitful term, yet the fact is that only two of this number served less than seven years, and but eight of them under ten years.

As in the earlier days, so did the members of the Library continue to choose for its managing board men of high standing in the community. Though fewer names of national repute are met with, it simply means that the aim was to elect persons so identified with civic interests of one kind or another, as to perceive the importance of the Library's advancing with the rest. The new names include that inventive genius, Col. John Stevens, son of "Stamp Act" John Stevens, a nephew of Lord Stirling



and brother-in-law to Chancellor Livingston; General Edward W. Laight, long a noted figure in social and legal affairs, a Trustee for a full generation; Peter Augustus Jay, eldest son of the first American Chief Justice, distinguished in his own right at the bar, as assemblyman and as city recorder, constant patron of charitable and literary movements, chairman of the board of trustees of Columbia College and president of the Historical Society; Anthony Bleecker, bred a lawyer but preëminently a man of letters, a wit and a poet, though modest to self-extinction; Gulian C. Verplanck, his life-long friend, whose name is so identified with the Society Library for almost sixty years, its Nestor indeed, then in the flush of young manhood; and the gentle, scholarly personality of Clement C. Moore, for years clerk of the board of trustees of Columbia College, an early benefactor to the General Seminary, in whose faculty he sat as professor of Hebrew and of Greek and Oriental literature, and who will be held in grateful remembrance forever, as the author of the poem beginning, "'T was the night before Christmas."

In striking contrast appears the energetic figure of that great apostle of genuine catholicity, the Right Rev. Dr. John Henry Hobart, rector of Trinity Church and bishop of New York. A man of force and action, an inveterate controversialist, yet of infinite tenderness and deep piety, he preached the gospel of a militant Christianity, the first modern churchman. His counsel was widely sought, and in unsparing service was his life spent, a seemingly untimely death ending his twenty-year term as Trustee of the Library, as of many another institution. An associate of his in Library matters as well as in church affairs was the Rev. Dr. Samuel F.

Jarvis, rector of St. James's and St. Michael's parishes, sometime assistant at Old Trinity, and just entering the faculty of the Seminary when called to the rectorship of St. Paul's at Boston.

Another member of a little coterie, to which Messrs. Jay and Moore belonged, was the Hon. David S. Jones, son of a former Trustee, Samuel Jones, "a chivalrous and polished gentleman, a kind-hearted and devoted friend, and a skilful practitioner in the private and confidential—though not less arduous and responsible—branches of the law."<sup>1</sup> Also of literary tastes, he was for years a trustee of Columbia College and of the General Seminary, as of the Library.

It is of interest to find not only that five representatives of the busy medical profession were called to the Library management, but that, excluding the failure of Dr. Wright Post to serve, the average term of the other four was over twelve years. They included the brilliant John Augustine Smith, one-time president of William and Mary College and later of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, a writer, lecturer and editor of renown, participating also in civic affairs in aldermanic councils. A personality less conspicuous, but no less faithful, in a trusteeship of fifteen years, is that of Dr. Charles Drake.

For more than twenty-five consecutive years the name of Rodgers appears upon the records in the persons of father and son. The former, Dr. John R. B. Rodgers, long a noted practitioner of the city and a scholar as well, was a hero of Valley Forge as one of the medical corps of the patriot troops, a charter member of the Society of

<sup>1</sup> William A. Duer. *Anniversary Address before the St. Nicholas Society, Dec. 1, 1848.* New York, 1849. P. 47.

the Cincinnati, for years on the staff of the New York Hospital and of Columbia College. His trusteeship in the Library, as in the Presbyterian Church, was perpetuated in that of his son, John Kearney Rodgers, a surgeon of great distinction. He is especially remembered as a founder of the Eye and Ear Infirmary, on whose staff he was leading surgeon for over thirty years, as also of the New York Hospital; and he was an early advocate and a charter member of the New York Academy of Medicine.

Other names include John Le Conte, the naturalist; Ezra Weeks, builder, long the popular host of the old City Hotel on Broadway, a director of the Academy of Fine Arts and a Trinity vestryman; Evert A. Bancker, worthy scion of an ancient and honorable Dutch family; John Ferguson, a trustee of Columbia College, naval officer of the port, and sometime mayor of the city; and James Renwick, professor of chemistry and philosophy in the college, a notable figure in the scientific gatherings of his day.

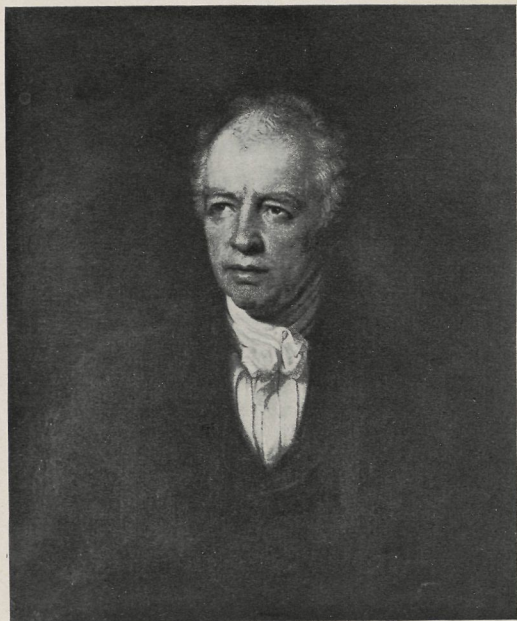
For the last name in the review, there has been reserved that of the Hon. John Jordan Morgan, whose unwearied labors in the Library's behalf covered twenty-two years. A native New Yorker of ample means, living in considerable style, representing the city in the assembly and in Congress, he divided the richness of his devotion between the Library and St. John's Chapel, as a vestryman of Old Trinity. The late Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, long the honored rector of that parish, said of his "Grandfather Morgan," his mother's uncle and adopted father, for these pages: "He was in politics a Jeffersonian Democrat of the strict school, but in personal bearing, manners and habits a thorough aristocrat. He



was always deeply interested in the Society Library. Among my early recollections is that of the daily visit to the Library, and of his long talks with the Librarian, 'Phil' Forbes, whose face I distinctly remember, as if photographed in the air."

Turning attention now to the administrative work of the Trustees for this period, one is impressed not alone with the length of service, but with the scarce occurrence of irregular vacancies, as well. On only four occasions was the board obliged to fill an unexpired term. The Rev. Dr. Jarvis resigned in October, 1820, on removing from town, and Dr. Wright Post's busy career prevented his accepting an election in 1817; while the remaining instances were both caused by the hand of death, Professor Kemp dying in November, 1812, in his nineteenth year of service, and "their deeply regretted Associate," Secretary Anthony Bleecker, in March, 1827, after nearly seventeen years of devoted trusteeship. It is interesting to note in passing that their successors, as chosen by the board, met with the approval of members of the corporation at subsequent elections. Professor Renwick wore Dr. Jarvis's mantle for more than thirteen years, and the declination of Dr. Post allowed the return of Gulian C. Verplanck, thus concluding the first hiatus in his extended term; while Dr. John R. B. Rodgers and Dr. J. Augustine Smith succeeded the deceased members respectively.

Between May, 1803, and December, 1812, the board met, nominally at least, on the second Tuesday of every month, apparently "at any time" that should prove convenient. But the new by-laws then adopted set the hour "at seven o'clock in the afternoon," on the first Wednesday in May, August, November, February and April.



Chancellor James Kent, L.L.D.

Trustee, 1796-1798





In May, 1818, the hour was again made "discretionary with the Secretary, . . . when not particularly directed by the board at a preceding meeting." In November, 1823, it was put back to seven o'clock, though in May, 1824, by another change, "for the future . . . at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past four o'clock in the afternoon." Finally, in April, 1825, the regular May meeting was fixed for the first Friday instead of Wednesday. The names most often appearing as chairman are those of Judge Benson, Bishop Hobart and General Laight, with John J. Morgan and ex-Mayor Ferguson not far behind.

Almost from the start the chief responsibility for matters of executive concern has devolved upon the Library Committee, although it has been for several years relieved of some of its burdens by the Finance Committee and the House Committee. At first indifferently termed "a committee to purchase Books for the Library," and later called "the Purchasing Committee," it definitely received its present name in the by-laws of 1812. Its duties as then outlined were "to inspect the state of the Library, from time to time"; to purchase books; to dispose of valueless copies, and to repair others; "and to take the general care and superintendence of the Library," reporting at each stated meeting. The number of its membership was set at three, and remained so until 1836, save from February, 1822, to May, 1824, when it was made five, no reasons being vouchsafed for either change.

In view, then, of the often onerous labors involved, it is natural that its members should be persons manifesting among other qualifications the deepest personal interest in the Library's welfare; and, as familiarity begets both despatch and facility, they were usually reap-

pointed as long as their trusteeship or willingness lasted. Those longest identified with this work for these years were Professor Kemp, Bishop Moore, the Hon. William Johnson, John Pintard, Anthony Bleecker, Gulian C. Verplanck, the Rev. Dr. Jarvis, John R. B. Rodgers, M.D., John J. Morgan and Bishop Hobart.

Included in their province were of course the appointment of a Librarian and the regulation of his salary; yet it was theirs also to attend to matters such as "the ruinous state of the cistern and cess pool in the Library yard," which they were ordered in September, 1820, to have repaired. More in line with the work of this committee to-day, however (barring the need of borrowing!), is an authorization, five years later, "to borrow a sum of money not exceeding \$1000," to be applied to importing books from England—not as common a procedure as in early days.

From time to time the Trustees had passed ordinances of one kind or another, as occasion demanded, but in a wholly disconnected fashion, with no effort at codification at all. Some of the earlier catalogues reflect such directions about loans, fines and open hours, as had last been determined upon by the board. But no systematic arrangement of the by-laws obtained until the appearance of the very elaborate and complete set approved in December, 1812, after seven years of procrastination, the final committee in charge comprising William Johnson and Peter Augustus Jay.

Under the title, "BY-LAWS AND ORDINANCES," the compilation covers eight and a half closely written folio pages in the minutes, and in the Catalogue of 1813 nearly fourteen pages of that octavo volume. The text is divided into seven chapters, as follows: "I Of the Elec-

tion of Trustees and Officers; II Of the Trustees; III Of the Admission and Privileges of Members; IV Of the Treasurer; V Of the Secretary; VI Of the Librarian; VII Of the Loaning of Books." Noteworthy changes included the readjustment of the polling hours at elections, formerly from 9 to 4, to read from 12 to 2, P.M.; while the scale of fines for overdue books was fixed at four cents for a folio, three cents for a quarto, and two cents for an octavo or smaller book or pamphlet. Members were allowed to detain a folio for six weeks; a quarto, three weeks; an octavo, two weeks; a duodecimo or lesser volume, or a pamphlet, one week,—only a single book at a time, unless the work comprised more than one volume, "relative to the same subject," when it was permissible to take out the whole set, if it included no more than 3 octavos or 6 duodecimos; though for no longer a time than for a single volume. Members residing more than ten miles from the City Hall might detain books a week longer. These loan provisions were continued without change until 1894, although since 1838 the fine for all overdue books has been one cent per day. For non-members the regulations required a deposit with the Librarian of "double the value of the book" or set, such deposit to be forfeit in the event of a book's becoming more than a month overdue, while their rates, to be deducted from the deposits, were to be: for a folio, 75c; for a quarto, 50c; for an octavo or smaller book, 25c a week, "and at least those sums respectively, although the book may be returned within one week." In after years as conditions changed, some of the provisions were amended, supplanted or wholly stricken out, or even, as will presently be seen in a review of the illegal election of 1825, simply disregarded.



As has been said, these by-laws were published in the Catalogue of 1813,<sup>1</sup> a most presentable octavo volume of nearly 300 pages, with which the half-dozen earlier pamphlet catalogues are not for a moment to be compared. Its preparation was the work of Librarian John Forbes, under the constant, critical supervision of William Johnson, Peter Wilson and Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell, to begin with, the two last-named later being relieved by Gulian C. Verplanck and Anthony Bleecker, who finally issued the book. Instructions of May, 1810, had further empowered them "to reject from the Library such books as they may judge unfit to be inserted in the Catalogue."

As a preface there first comes an "Address" of about 800 words, "to the friends and votaries of literature and science,"—written by William Johnson. The collection is declared to contain nearly 12,500 volumes, "comprising the works of the most eminent authors, ancient and modern; many of them in choice and splendid editions," rarely to be found in private libraries. Assurance is given in measured phrase that an immediate acquisition of "a ready supply of recent and periodical publications, as well as the more expensive works of science" is prevented only by "the circumscribed funds of the society and a debt contracted by the erecting and subsequent additions to the building." The Trustees, however, "feel persuaded that in a city so distinguished for its prosperity and opulence, and which has never yet incurred the imputation of refusing patronage and encouragement to the cause of Literature and the liberal

<sup>1</sup>*A Catalogue of the Books belonging to the New-York Society Library, together with the Charter*

*and By-laws of the Same.* Printed by C. S. Van Winkle, New York, 1813.

arts, the maintenance of a public library can never be a matter of unconcern."

In this appeal for new subscribers, which was not "to solicit pecuniary aid without offering an adequate consideration," nor simply "to descant on the utility of public libraries," there follows a brief summary of the Library's assets and the value of its shares. The address in its concluding sentences exposes the lamentable indifference of New Yorkers to the cause of letters; though "the facilities they [libraries] afford to the researches of scientific men, the literary taste and curiosity they have a tendency to excite in the minds of ingenuous and aspiring youth, and the asylum they offer, from the ravages of accident and time, for the productions of genius and exalted virtue, are circumstances sufficiently obvious to every person of intelligence and reflection."

After the table of contents come the charter and the by-laws, already mentioned, a list of Trustees and officers for the current year, and then the "Names of the Subscribers," numbering 542 and arranged alphabetically, only, however, so far as the initial letter of the surname goes. Besides those familiar as Trustees at one time or another, there may be mentioned a few names standing for achievement in various lines, such as John Jacob Astor, the founder of that wealth-prominent house, Dr. Archibald Bruce, Mayors De Witt Clinton and Cadwallader D. Colden, "Columbia College, sen'r class," Dr. John Griscom, scientific investigator and a pioneer in the lecture field, Judge Josiah Ogden Hoffman, David Hosack, M.D., a leader in all cultural movements, the Hon. John Jay, first Chief Justice of the United States, Dr. Peter Irving, editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, Madam Eliza Jumel, whom Aaron

Burr espoused, Professor John McVickar, D.D., of the Columbia faculty, Selah Strong, Thomas Swords the publisher, Lieut-Col. George Turnbull, Stephen Van Rensselaer, last patroon of the famous manor of Rensselaerswyck, John Van Nostrand, Samuel Ward, father of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe and a member of the great banking firm of Prime, Ward and King, and old Col. Marinus Willett, as also family names of long standing, like Beekman, Bleecker, Bogert, Brinckerhoff, Crommeline, Demilt, De Peyster, Dyckman, Hamersley, Hoffman, Laight, Lefferts, Livingston, Ludlow, Murray, Ogden, Oothoudt, Provoost, Philipse, Remsen, Rhineland, Roosevelt, Schermerhorn, Schieffelin, Stagg, Stevens, Swartwout, Van Alen, Van Cortlandt, Van Horne, Varick, Verplanck, Walton and Watts.

The catalogue proper, covering 232 pages, is thus topically classified:

1. Sacred History, Theology, Ecclesiastical History, Sacred Criticism, and Religious Controversy; 2. Classic Authors (Greek and Latin); 3. Ethicks, Logick, Metaphysics, &c.; 4. Mathematics, Natural and Experimental Philosophy, Astronomy, Chemistry, and Arts; 5. Natural History, Botany, Agriculture, &c.; 6. Civil and Military History, Antiquities, Mythology, Chronology, Biography and Memoirs; 7. General History, &c.; 8. Politics, Legislation, Political Œconomy, Commerce, and Revenue; 9. Geography, Topography, Voyages, and Travels; 10. Education, Dictionaries, Grammars, Philology, Belles-Lettres, and Criticism; also Encyclopædias; 11. Poetry and Drama; 12. Fictitious Writings, Novels, Romances, and Fables; 13. Medicine and Surgery; 14. Architecture, Civil, Military and Naval; 15. Magazines, Reviews, Transactions of Learned Societies, and News Papers; 16. Miscellanies; 17. Pamphlets, &c.

Lastly as an appendix comes "A List of [155] Books," added "since the Catalogue was put to Press," conclud-



ing with five bound volumes of pamphlets. Set apart here also is a collection of some 225 titles thus designated: "The following Books were presented by Francis B. Winthrop, Esq. and were part of the Library of John Winthrop Esq. first Governor of Massachusetts."<sup>1</sup> This substantial increment was acknowledged through Dr. Archibald Bruce in December, 1812. Like the venerable Sharpe Collection and others since bestowed, the Winthrop Library has always been kept by itself.

Even a hasty glance at the array of titles in the new catalogue detects a preponderating seriousness. The aim of the founders had been faithfully cherished; the lapse of two generations had but deepened and quickened the purpose of the management to cultivate and gratify that "Taste for polite Literature" and "eager Thirst after Knowledge and Wisdom," confidently supposed to exist in the far-away days of 1754.<sup>2</sup>

For example, the section devoted to "Fictitious Writings" is the smallest in the whole classification. A perusal of its attractions fails to discover anything more sensational than "Clelia, an excellent new Romance by the exquisite pen of M. de Scudery," or "Louisa, or the Lady of the Hay-Stack, from the French." One may well speculate on what might be the long-distance theories of the unknown Irish author of "Negro equalled by few Europeans." Some human touches would seem assured in the "Historical Dictionary of Love, containing Anecdotes of Persons eminent for their Virtues and Vices," to say nothing of "Sketches of the History, Genius, Disposition, &c. of the Fair Sex."

This Catalogue of 1813, then, deserves more than

<sup>1</sup> Later corrected to read, "John Winthrop, the Founder of Connecticut." Catalogue of 1850, p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, p. 157.

passing mention as an exhaustive work, carefully performed under expert direction. The great pity is that its usefulness should have been doomed almost at the start; like the garments of a fast-growing child, it was destined ere long to become but an outworn relic. Nevertheless, fully ten years passed before the board took renewed action on the subject, beyond expressing appreciation of occasional gifts. It should be said that about 300 titles in the catalogue are followed by the phrase "Gift of —," the chief benefactors being John Pintard, G. C. Verplanck, William Johnson, G. Bragg of Birmingham, England (largely on Swedenborgian doctrines), Dr. Hosack, T. B. Hollis of London, Judge Benson, Dr. J. W. Francis, Samuel Parsons and Dr. Mitchill. Besides more than thirty complimentary copies of their own productions by various authors, editors, publishers and translators, other donors were Henry Laight, Dr. J. Augustine Smith, D. C. Verplanck, G. Gilbert, Noah Webster, De Witt Clinton, Professor N. F. Moore, Clement C. Moore, P. Middlemas, John Forbes, L. Sands, John Nitchie, Esq., Robert Bowne, the Church du St. Esprit and "Mr. Gahagan of Dublin."

With the passage of time, however, came need for a fresh accounting; in November, 1823, the Library Committee was authorized to print a supplement. Announcement of the completed task was made in April, 1825, by Mr. Verplanck, who had "the satisfaction of laying before the Board the printed Supplement . . . containing the titles of above 4000 volumes added since the year 1813," together with 138 volumes, "added since the Catalogue went to press."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Books belonging to the New-*

*York Society Library.* Printed by C. S. Van Winkle, New York, 1825.





Conforming in style and arrangement with the main catalogue, it contains two additional divisions, "Periodical Publications, &c." and "Novels, &c.," both showing regard to the popular trend. The former includes six daily and two weekly journals and fifteen magazines; but it is in the "Novels" department that the most marked advance appears. There are fully 570 distinct works, ranging in calibre from the Waverly Novels, "Sorrows of Werther," "Robinson Crusoe," "Don Quixote" and "Thaddeus of Warsaw" to "Winifred, 'a Tale of Wonder,'" "Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy," "Life of a Lover, 6 vols., by H. Lee," "Camilla, or Pretence of Youth, 3 vols.," "Child of Thirty-six Fathers," "Celina, or Widowed Bride, 4 vols.," "Clarissa Harlowe, by Richardson, 8 vols.," the same, "Abridged, 1 vol.," or "D—— D——, 1 vol."

As before, presents of books were frequently received, individual acknowledgment appearing in the Supplement. A particularly serviceable gift, in January, 1826, was "a set of *The New-York Evening Post*, from its commencement in 1801 to the present time," from former Trustee Richard Varick.

In the course of its career, the Library has met with not a few attacks in the newspapers, as will appear in due season. Here, however, is an extract from a more appreciative source, an editorial note of the *Evening Post* for January 13, 1827:

We notice with great pleasure the rapid increase of valuable books in this Library. The Society has just received from London the books . . . which have cost them about \$1200. These books have just been deposited in the Library, and some of them are splendid specimens of typography. Among them are Malcolm's Central India & History of Persia, Ker Porter's

Travels in Persia, Marsden's History of Sumatra, Mill's India, Massinger's Plays, Transactions of the Linnean Society, and the volumes wanting to make complete sets of the New Annual and Edinburgh Annual Registers.

Continuing, the article sketches briefly the history of this "most ancient public Library in the State, . . . the third for size and value in the United States, being inferior only to those of Cambridge and Philadelphia," and possessing "above 18,000 volumes, many of which are of the most rare and valuable description." The notice, however, ends with the customary regret at the building's being so "badly situated." If only more centrally located, the institution would "no doubt receive from the public of New York that attention which it so justly merits."

An interesting collection received by the Society Library comprised several hundred works in Italian, deposited there in May, 1827, by the cultivated Signor Lorenzo Da Ponte, a poet and a musician in his own right and at that time professor of Italian literature in Columbia College. The year before, he had founded his Italian Library Society, an enterprise which met with the more favor because of the great enthusiasm shown by New Yorkers in the first rendition of Italian opera in this country, in October, 1825, its introduction being chiefly due to this same brilliant Venetian. Encouraged, therefore, by a goodly number of subscriptions, and the collection increasing, he made an arrangement with the Library Committee to accommodate his books in return for their free use to members of the institution.

Signor Da Ponte inserted in the *American*, May 21-28, 1827, a notice "To my Pupils," stating that he had placed 600 books in the Society Library with the expect-

tation of 400 more soon to arrive from Europe, the whole assortment to contain "the flower of our literature in all the useful arts and sciences." From the original subscription book—now preserved in the Library, together with a printed catalogue and some written memoranda—it appears that by October, 1829, the society had a membership of over seventy persons, holding nearly one hundred shares. These cost five dollars each, with an annual tax of one dollar a year, later discontinued. Entries in the hand of Librarian Philip Forbes show that new shares were taken up to April, 1834. Among the number were Professors Renwick and Anderson of Columbia, Clement C. Moore, Daniel Embury and General Laight, sometime Trustees of the Society Library.

As for the collection, it was reported by the Library Committee in February, 1829, to include only 280 volumes. In his enthusiasm, Professor Da Ponte may have inadvertently been guilty of enlargement, or else a number of the books had not been returned. According to their minutes, the trustees of Columbia College purchased of Signor Da Ponte about 300 books between January, 1826, and November, 1829, though these were supposedly his private property. He himself died in 1838 at a great age, and, the association ceasing to exist as its patrons all passed away, the Society Library has come quietly into possession.

Thus by purchase, by gift and by deposit, the collection of the Society Library steadily accumulated until it numbered in April, 1829, nearly 20,000 volumes. Let us now briefly note the gradual changes in the hours of opening and closing during these twenty-five years.

The rule of April, 1800, of "every day (except Sun-



days) from nine to two," was in force until May, 1807, when the time was fixed at "every day except Sunday from two o'clock in the afternoon to Sun set."<sup>1</sup> (It may as well be remarked here that the Library has never, throughout its history, been open on Sunday.) The carefully revised by-laws of December, 1812, changed the schedule to read "from 10 o'clock in the forenoon to 2 o'clock in the afternoon," a custom which obtained for nearly eighteen years, though not without arousing dissatisfaction.

This feeling voiced itself in several press notices early in 1824, for instance, alike protesting, in the name of "a daily editor, or active merchant or professional man," at the inconvenient hours. A communication signed "Subscriber," in the *American* for January 26th, led off with "respectfully soliciting" the Trustees "to open the rooms in the afternoon or evening for the accommodation of Mercantile men." Two days later an editorial article in the *Statesman*, entitled "City Library," asserted that the institution, though "containing many rare and valuable books, in the very centre of our city," was "at present of comparatively little utility to our citizens." Instead of being open only for "men of leisure," at the hours of "a ladies' drawing room, a fashionable resort," it should, like the Boston Athenæum,

<sup>1</sup> This change evoked instant criticism, a protest from "A Subscriber," in the *Mercantile Advertiser* of June 11th, saying: "I have sent my black boy to the Library twice or thrice a week for books, and he always brought word, that it was shut up. . . . I could not help reflecting on the deterioration of this useful institution. When the books were kept in the City Hall, access might be had to them three hours in the fore-

noon and the same in the afternoon: . . . Is it that we totally neglect reading and are grown so besotted with prosperity and riches as to regard all moral acquisitions with contempt, or is the access to the Library to be obstructed and gradually abridged till it tapers off to nothing at all?" A like complaint, signed "Z. Z.," including a demand for a new catalogue, appears in the same paper, July 14th.

“be a place open till ten at night, where the industrious and intelligent may resort, after the avocations of the day, and consult the various writers on different subjects without interruption. It should be a place where all could leave the bustle of the family and boarding-house, and pass an hour or two in the acquisition of knowledge.” Lastly, in the *American* for January 31st, one suggests, in behalf of “Many Subscribers,” an extra levy of eight dollars each year, “for the privilege of reading in the Library Room,” adding that, if “a few newspapers, from different parts of the Union, were taken,” there would be no objection to the small price named, especially if the institution be kept “open from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M.” In the light of these sensible and moderate suggestions, it does seem strange that the Trustees should not have made some effort to meet the general want, in part at least. Their failure to respond, however caused, doubtless proved a potent factor in the establishment of the New York Athenæum, only a few months later.

Turning now to the office and perquisites of the Librarian, it will be recalled that John Forbes, appointed in June, 1794, was, in 1798, receiving a salary of £100 (\$250) a year, with fines and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on collections, besides the use or rental of the front lower room. In May, 1803, instead of that apartment was substituted “the sole use and occupation of the back Rooms . . . with the whole of the Cellars.” Five years later a return was made in giving him the disposal of the front room, “at present occupied by E. W. Laight, Esq.” as a law office. No allusion to salary is found, until the detailed report of May, 1810, on “the State of the Library,” cites it as \$200, with the recommendation that it be paid

quarterly, plus a commission of five per cent. on collections. The board, however, contented itself with granting him "the Rent of the lower part of the Library Building for the present year."

Alas for the poor man's prospects, his tenant proved unable to pay, resulting in a loss of \$375 to Mr. Forbes, though the board authorized him "to make use of all legal means to recover" the arrears, at the same time renewing to him the lease of the apartments to such tenant as the Purchasing Committee should think proper. In the meantime, also, the Historical Society, of whose collections he had been Librarian during the five years' sojourn of that institution in the "City Library," had removed in 1809 to the Government House, thus further reducing his income. So in November, 1813, he "informed the board that his present salary was too small, and that he hoped they would increase his compensation." Accordingly his accounts were examined, as a result of which, in April, 1814, he was voted \$500 a year, with fines, five per cent. on collections, and the rental of the whole lower floor, this remuneration continuing until his death, in October, 1824, "in the 50th year of his age."<sup>1</sup>

From available sources few particulars can be given of the life of John Forbes, other than that he was a faithful Librarian for full thirty years. A native of Aberdeen, he was brought to this country in childhood by his widowed mother, a canny Scotchwoman of great resolution and piety, that he might have a good chance for a start in life. Upon her remarriage he was forced to shift for himself, like many another successful Ameri-

<sup>1</sup> From the death notice in the *Evening Post* and in the *American*, October 5, 1824.



can. Early evincing a fondness for books, he must have shown uncommon maturity of judgment and executive ability to secure so important a post at the youthful age of nineteen.<sup>1</sup> He grew with the years and became recognized as a student and man of wide information. Dr. John W. Francis, in his reminiscent "New York during the last Half-Century," styles him "the learned librarian of the Society Library." Out of respect to his memory the Trustees voted to attend his funeral in a body, and ordered the building closed the rest of that week—four days.

A month later his brother-in-law, Burtis Skidmore, "who had acted in his stead during his illness" and since his death, was appointed to fill the vacancy, a position which he held until May, 1828, at the same remuneration accorded Mr. Forbes. At that time, his own business requiring his undivided attention (young Philip J. Forbes, oldest son of the late Librarian, having reached his majority in the meantime, and being thoroughly conversant with the routine work), Mr. Skidmore retired in favor of his nephew, whom the Trustees thereupon formally chose Librarian at a salary of \$600 a year; and, giving immediate satisfaction, his appointment was made permanent in the position he was to occupy for nearly a generation.

Every year, however, as regular as clockwork, came the election of Trustees. So far as the records show, the annual meetings of this period were conducted smoothly,

<sup>1</sup> This early distinction, however, is as nothing compared with the precocity attributed to Mr. Forbes by a compiler of the history of the Dutch Church school, who states that in 1774—within a year of his birth—one of the officers of that institution

was Deacon "John Forbes, *Secretary and Librarian of N. Y. Society Library, 1794 to 1824*"! *History of the School of the Collegiate Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York, 1633-1883*. New York, 1883. Second edition, p. 99.



General Edward William Laight  
Trustee, 1809–1839. Treasurer, 1810–1826





—not to say tamely,—without seeming let or hindrance. Even the report of the election inspectors for 1825,—an episode soon to be reviewed,—though departing from stereotyped form, reveals no trace even of disaffection. In compliance with time-honored regulation, notices of the coming event were published in local papers a full fortnight in advance, while there is less reason to doubt that placards, heralding the function in John Forbes's bravest penmanship, adorned "the outward door of the Library room."

The minutes record the appointment and report of the Election Committee year after year in strict conformity with the detailed ordinance passed in February, 1793, save that for some reason there were four persons instead of three in 1806 and 1810. The original rule required the inspectors to be members of the board, and this practice was continued unchanged—though not so enjoined in the by-laws of 1812—until 1819. In that year two of them were not Trustees, and, for the ten years ensuing, non-members were regularly appointed, as is compulsory to-day. The nearest approach to the old order occurred in 1824, when John Le Conte, an inspector, was himself elected. The Trustees had doubtless come to regard it as undignified for some of their own number to preside at an election, as seeming bidders for continuance in office, or else they judged it better for appearance's sake to have others count the ballots. Whatever their motive, we must not charge them with seeking to divest themselves of labor or responsibility,—a thesis impossible to defend.

Usually the same men were selected each year, and in but few instances do the signatures of the full committee fail to appear as evidence of attendance. A study of

the lists discloses that in the twenty-six years from 1793 to 1818, inclusive, when only Trustees served, Hugh Gainé had twelve appointments (ending only with his death), William Johnson, ten, Anthony Bleecker, seven, and Gulian C. Verplanck, six, while Professor Kemp acted as inspector in every one of his eighteen years of trusteeship. From 1819 to 1829 there was of course a greater latitude in choosing the make-up of the committee, but those most often appointed were Evert A. Bancker, later a Trustee, James F. Watson, Henry Laight and Edward M. Willett.

Therefore this habitual even-tenor will ill prepare us—as it did the men of that day—for the bombshell report of a disputed election in 1825. Unlike the contests of earlier or later days, there seem to have been no advance warnings of the coming stroke. Taken utterly by surprise, the management of the Library had a wholly unprecedented situation to face. That for the time being there must have been a lack of harmony—let alone acrimony—is painfully evident; but, in view of its transitory character and the meagerness of our information, it is best to let well-enough alone, and to raise no fresh cloud of the long-settled dust.

The subject is in itself both stimulating and satisfying. The possibility of open rupture, submission to expert opinion, a speedy adjustment and evident acquiescence on the part of those decided against,—all these phases of the affair offer lessons on arbitrament by law and the prevention of disorder, well worthy of respectful consideration—not to say emulation—in even this advanced age. So, in presenting the successive stages of the episode, no attempt will be made to expatiate or to explain. Simply the evidence bearing on the

affair from written and printed sources will be set forth, and the reader may for once draw his own conclusions, unhampered by another's interpretation.

It appears from the returns that the unusually large number of sixty ballots were cast, but that only eleven persons received a majority of votes, thirty-one or over. Among them were but three of the former board, General Laight, Anthony Bleecker and Professor Renwick; while the others were Messrs. John Trumbull, Alfred S. Pell, Thomas L. Smith, James Watson, Jasper F. Seaman, Samuel L. Gouverneur, John R. Murray and Samuel Jones. The twelfth man on the list, James Jones, received but twenty-eight votes. On April 29th, in the midst of the uncertainty, nine of the old board assembled to discuss the situation. After listening to the Election Committee's report and to a written protest from eight shareholders,—including one Trustee, Gulian C. Verplanck,—against the validity of the returns, inasmuch as many votes "were not given by persons legally admitted as members," they resolved to submit the case to Chancellor Kent, a former Trustee, authorizing Messrs. Bleecker and Verplanck "to present to him a retaining or counsel fee of twenty-five dollars."

While the board awaits his opinion, let us pay heed to a press notice evolved by the phenomenon, which it attempts to explain. In an *Evening Post* communication of April 29th, "A Share Holder" denounces the intent of newly elected Trustees, "to melt down this old and respectable institution, that it may come out bright as a new dollar, under the name and style of the 'New-York Atheneum,' " "a proposition to connect the two concerns" having already been rejected by the Library.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 298.



The article concludes with the writer's expressed determination to oppose the project, "however hallowed, if such means as those resorted to are necessary to effect it."

"Additional information" about this extraordinary election is supplied by another "Share Holder," in the *American* for May 2d. Describing the customary annual meeting—"conducted without parade" in the presence of "perhaps ten or twelve members"—with this one, at which sixty ballots were cast, he declares that forty or fifty of them "proceeded from the new party," which by "mask or manœuvre" had kept its plans secret (one of its followers being overheard to remark: "I do not believe that the others had any idea of this opposition"). Furthermore, four new shares had been taken on that same day,—“a very unusual circumstance,”—two of the purchasers certainly having "voted for the new party,"—"the two youths dressed in uniform who were brought to the Library by a gentleman," then elected a Trustee. Again, nine of the voters bore the same name as the aforesaid individual! Yet, with all his suspicions, still in the dark, the writer "would be glad to discover" what was "behind the curtain." If the scheme was to unite the Library and the Athenæum,—as "says rumour,"—then many questions would press for settlement. There was foundation for this belief in the fact that several Trustees-elect were "most zealous supporters of the Athenæum."

As might be expected, this extended charge drew a smart retort from the directorate of the new institution, in the form of an editorial note in the next day's *American*, pronouncing such a surmise "entirely groundless," and asserting indignantly that "no person, in any way

interested in the affairs of the Athenæum," had "had any hand in the management" of the Library election then in dispute.

Meanwhile the old board had met again on May 2d to listen to the opinion of Chancellor Kent. Unfortunately the limits set us forbid giving even in outline this lucid and convincing argument, which, in the averagely fine handwriting of Secretary Bleecker covers more than five folio pages. It is a paper of great interest, not merely by virtue of its effectual settlement of a delicate problem, but no less as being an admirable specimen of the clear, terse and vigorous style of its celebrated author. With his reasoning based wholly on the provisions of the charter,—“which discovers a solicitude to preserve a full constitutional board of Trustees,”—he thus concludes: “Upon the whole, for the reasons which have been suggested, I incline very strongly to the opinion that the Election is void *in toto*, and that the former Trustees are entitled to hold over.”

Acting on this advisement, the board at once framed a resolution, to “be published together with the names of the present Trustees.” Then, weary but triumphant, the crisis safely past, they adjourned, having happily avoided what bade fair to cause a serious disturbance, if not disruption of the organization. The notice inserted in the *Evening Post* for May 3d rehearses the facts, “the opinion of eminent counsel,” and the resolution that the election of 1825 must therefore be deemed null and void, the Trustees chosen in 1824 to continue in office until other fit persons be elected in their places, “pursuant to the charter.” Accordingly these were Bishop Hobart, General Laight, Professor Renwick, Dr. J. K. Rodgers, Dr. Charles Drake and Messrs. John J. Morgan, John

Ferguson, John Le Conte, Ezra Weeks, David S. Jones, Gulian C. Verplanck and Anthony Bleecker.

In the editorial columns of the *Post* for the same date, the Trustees are congratulated upon their "fit and spirited" protest, "against the improper, illegal and dishonorable attempt, lately made by a secret combination of persons, to turn out the former officers and foist upon the institution a new set of men, who, so far from possessing the confidence of the society, are not even personally known to them." The note closes with an authorization from the Athenæum Directors "to deny, in the most positive manner, all participation in such conduct, and to declare it is considered by them to be highly unworthy and ought not to be countenanced."

Whence, then, came the movement, and what was its purpose? We are obliged to wait several years for the answer. A report of the Library Committee, in February, 1830, finds consolation for the "apparent loss" of considerable revenue, in the fact that many of the forfeited shares had been purchased with a view to "the attempt made some years since to turn the Library into a Bank." A supplementary reference is found in a pamphlet issued by the board in April, 1833, as follows:

It is only eight years since several persons, supposing that the charter of the Library contained banking powers, endeavored to possess themselves of the institution, for the purpose of turning it into a bank. Although an unusual number of shares was bought for some months before the election, the project was conducted with such secrecy that the Trustees had no notice of it. Though surprised, they were determined if possible to save the Library, and a high legal opinion having been given, that the election—which it was contended had gone against them—was void, the Trustees held over; and at the next annual



election an overwhelming vote put down the bank projectors and saved the Library, for a time, from all other projectors.<sup>1</sup>

On looking back now to the editorial comment in the *American* of May 3d, partly quoted above, we find this hint,—whose meaning would be obscure without later revelations,—“It cannot but be a subject of regret to the friends of this literary institution, that the speculative spirit which seems to possess the people, or certain portions of it, should seek its gratification even in the haunts of literature.”

Thus the untoward episode came to a peaceable issue, but its influence may be traced in several later developments. First of all, the Trustees at their next session, after choosing officers for the year as usual, drew up two resolutions: first, that recent purchasers of shares who had received certificates and paid their dues be considered “admitted members”; and second, that a section of the by-law relating to the Secretary be amended to read: “He shall keep the seal of the corporation but shall not affix the same to any instrument without the special direction of the Trustees.”

A secondary effect may perhaps be read in the choice of a wholly different set of inspectors for the next annual election. This fact may be too trivial to mention, and possibly had no bearing at all on the case in point, but certain it is that three years elapsed before one of this year’s committee was given another appointment; and it is equally true that the same trio never again served in that capacity together. Finally, a no less enduring result—and one directly attributable to the

<sup>1</sup> *Address of the Trustees of the New York Society Library to the Members of the Society, relative to*

*the Management and Present Condition of that Institution.* New York, 1833.

threatened but happily averted embroglio—found embodiment in a custom soon after adopted. This was to enter in the minutes the names of new members as approved by the board, in conformity with the charter and by-laws—a practice in force to-day.

During these twenty-five years now passing in review, the Library maintained its depot of usefulness in the Nassau Street building, whose original number, "16," was changed to "33," in 1827. The structure was certainly serving its purpose well. From time to time needed repairs and slight alterations were made to accommodate the growing collection. For example, in May, 1825, the Library Committee was directed to have the stairs "leading from the east end of the Library floor" removed "to make more room," as well as to have the woodwork "painted white," and the ceiling white-washed, and to provide "new shelves and cases for the books" and "an additional reading table or tables."

The lower rooms continued to be rented as offices, though the minutes shed little light on the identity or occupation of their tenants. Besides those before mentioned, Richard Harison, a noted lawyer of his day, used the two rear rooms for several years in the '20's. As has been noted, the rental at times formed part of the Librarian's emolument, but again accrued directly to the treasury. Likewise the cellar or "basement" had a varied career. At first held in reserve, then granted to the sole use of the Librarian, that officer was empowered in May, 1818, to rent it to "some careful person, or small family without children," as part payment for janitor services. Such an occupant appears to have been there from 1821 to 1825, the Library Committee reports for those years announce, also stating that the

# A SERMON

Preached At  
Trinity Church in New-York  
in America, *August 13. 1706.*

At the FUNERAL of  
The Right Honourable *Katherine* Lady  
*CORN BURY*,

*Barroness Clifton of Leighton Bromswold, &c.*  
Heiress to the most Noble *Charles* Duke of  
*Richmond and Lenox;*

A N D

Wife to his Excellency *Edward* Lord Viscount  
*CORNBURY*, Her Majesties Captain General and  
Governour in chief of the Provinces of *New-York*,  
*New-Jersey*, and Territories depending there-  
on in *America*, &c.

---

By John Sharpe, A.M. *Chaplain to the Queens Forces*  
*in the Province of New-York.*

---

Printed and Sold by *William Bradford* at the Bible in  
New-York, 1706.



basement was "reserved unlet from apprehension of fire."

Throughout its history, the Society Library has been favored above most institutions in respect to loss by fire. The precaution above cited indicates the spirit of vigilance that has ever characterized its management. On one occasion, however, the building was greatly imperiled, at a time when a veritable holocaust devastated its neighborhood, utterly destroying several buildings used as schoolhouses, as well as private dwellings, and damaging others, besides "consuming" five persons.<sup>1</sup> That the structure was preserved only by great exertion is plain from this card of appreciation in the *Commercial Advertiser* for August 25, 1808: "The Librarian of the New-York Society Library, in behalf of the Trustees, returns his grateful thanks to the gentlemen who kindly aided in saving the Library from the destructive fire of last night."

At this time the building was still insured for \$9000. This amount remained unchanged, with nothing said about the books, until August, 1817, when the policy was altered to read \$10,000 "on the building and book cases." Until 1824 the policy ran on seven-year terms; then began a system of annual policies of \$5000 on the building and \$10,000 on its contents.

Satisfied and proud as members of the Library undoubtedly were in the possession of so tasteful and serviceable a building, almost from the first there is evident on the part of the Trustees an eagerness for its disposal. Not that they were ever craving some new thing, or desirous to tear it down for a greater structure.

<sup>1</sup> See accounts in the *Commercial Advertiser* and the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* for August 25, 1808.

Its maintenance was handicapped by the burdensome debt incidental to its erection. So it redounds greatly to the credit and ability of the Trustees that, through these years of public indifference and private embarrassment, they succeeded not only in steering clear of bankruptcy, but even in materially increasing the collection. We are now to review the series of overtures and negotiations in which this institution figured, with the hope of its removal to other quarters, that by a sale of its holdings the oppressive incumbrance might be lifted.

The first chance of such removal was broached in February, 1807, in a request from members of the Historical Society, the Society of Fine Arts and the Medical Society, to join them in petitioning the legislature for the use of the Government House for their several purposes. Though promptly favoring the application, the Trustees apparently heard no more of the project. Perhaps, however, accommodations were offered and deemed insufficient, for the Society of Fine Arts presently removed thither, followed in September, 1809, by the Historical Society, whose books had hitherto been deposited in the Society Library. In passing, it may be said that the Government House, originally designed for the residence of President Washington, but not finished till after the departure of the Federal Government from New York, was occupied by Governors George Clinton and John Jay until the removal of the state capital to Albany, in 1797. Up to the time of its demolition in 1815, it was used as the custom house; so it is an interesting coincidence that the row of dwellings erected on its site below Bowling Green has in turn made way for our sumptuous new custom house.

The next effort was made in a personal letter<sup>1</sup> to Mayor De Witt Clinton in August, 1812, from John Pintard, then a Trustee of the Library and secretary of the Historical Society, suggesting that the Corporation of the city "foster the Arts, Science, & Literature in this place," by appropriating, for the use of the "City Library," the Academy of Arts, the Historical Society and the "American Museum," accommodations in either the old almshouse or the much older bridewell—both buildings soon to become vacant by the transfer of their inmates to Bellevue. If the bridewell should be offered, —as indeed many years later it was tendered to the Society Library, but on terms distasteful to a majority of its members,<sup>2</sup>—the several associations would "engage to ornament the exterior of that Building & render it similar in appearance to the New City Hall." But, "should it be objected that this Building together with the Gaol<sup>3</sup> ought to be prostrated as interfering with the elegant perspective of the City Hall," then let one end of the old almshouse be set apart for these societies, for "by centering all our resources we may give a greater impulse and elevation to our intellectual character."

Next, sketching the history and usefulness of each institution in turn, he says of the "City Library," that, though "grown to considerable importance both as to number & value of Books," it yet "languishes under a debt," whose interest and current expenses "preclude the purchase of important works." But, if the Library were only in "apartments free from rent," and "relieved

<sup>1</sup> This letter, dated August 28, 1812, is in the possession of the New York Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Built in 1758, and known as the Provost prison during the Revolution. Used for years as the Hall of Records, it was razed in 1902-1903.



of debt" by the sale of the building, it would be "capacitated to acquire those rare and expensive works in science & Literature so essentially requisite to enlighten & improve, works which too far exceed the power of individuals to procure."

Yet all the answer Mr. Pintard got for his trouble and interest appears in the following marginal endorsement in his own hand: "Mem<sup>o</sup> M<sup>r</sup> Clinton on reading this communication observed 'that the request was *too impudent* to be submitted to the Corporation!'" Well might John Pintard add, instead of an "Amen," his private motto, "Never Despair." For, as will presently be seen, his project was carried out to a nicety. In his diary for March 18, 1814, occurs the following allusion to this beneficent scheme of his own conjuring, quoted nearly in full to reproduce not alone the actual words of that public-spirited man, but also a little New York atmosphere of a century ago. With the charming touch of a nature lover he begins: "The First Spring Morning—heard Bluebirds sing—a field in the Bowery was sufficiently free from frost to be ploughed."

Then, making for his particular hobby, already revealed in the Clinton letter, he continues:

It is but a few days that M<sup>r</sup> McComb the Street Commissioner showed me the rough draft of a design for improving the Front of the present Bridewell to render it suitable to the elegance of the City Hall. On reflection it appeared that the expense to take down the present front & rebuild with marble would be very great & after all that the Building is so narrow . . . as not to afford, without a Rotunda in the rear, sufficient capacity for the purposes it is required to accommodate the Academy of Arts, the Philosophical & N. Y. Historical Societies. The alternative is to request the Corporation to make a temporary grant of the present Alms House which would afford ample room for

the above institutions, for the City Library & the American Museum, owned by John Scudder, where they could remain for some years, until the increase of the wealth of this City sh<sup>d</sup> afford sufficient patronage to erect two wings of marble & correspondent Architecture on each side the City Hall w<sup>ch</sup> w<sup>d</sup> embellish the City & accommodate these public institutions. But, sh<sup>d</sup> the parsimonious views of the projectors for selling the aforesaid ground prevail, all these projects will vanish.

By the middle of May, as a result of his vigorous initiative, a petition had been laid before the Common Council from "sundry Literary Societies,"—the Academy of Arts, represented by Cadwallader D. Colden, Dr. David Hosack and William Cutting; the Historical Society, by John Pintard, Peter A. Jay and Gulian C. Verplanck; the Literary and Philosophical Society, by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, Dr. John Griscom and James A. Smith; and the Society Library, by Dr. John R. B. Rodgers, Edward W. Laight and Anthony Bleecker,—“praying from the Corporation a grant of the ground and the building thereon occupied as the Bridewell for the accommodation of the said Societies and for the purposes of their respective Institutions.”<sup>1</sup>

This movement, it will be noticed, was organized in the midst of the War of 1812. No less applicable in 1814 than two years before, therefore, is the following excerpt from the Pintard-Clinton letter above quoted:

It may be urged that this is not the moment for such great enterprizes, that our City is paralyzed by the present times, and that little encouragement can be expected for the promotion of Literary establishments. True; *Inter Arma Silent Leges*. But we have a right, *Auspice Teucro*, to hope for better times; and

<sup>1</sup> MS. *Minutes of the Common Council* for May 2 and 16, 1814. Proceedings from 1784 to 1831, as yet unprinted, are in the City Hall.

it may be proper to anticipate any other applications respecting the public buildings.

Though commerce was indeed prostrate, the enthusiasm of the populace for the war had not diminished, in view of the fact that the authorities were supported in bestowing the freedom of the city upon no fewer than a dozen military and naval heroes within two years, including the usual addresses in golden boxes, as also articles of silver plate suitably inscribed, or in requesting the objects of popular admiration to sit for their portraits—such being the origin of many paintings in the City Hall to-day.

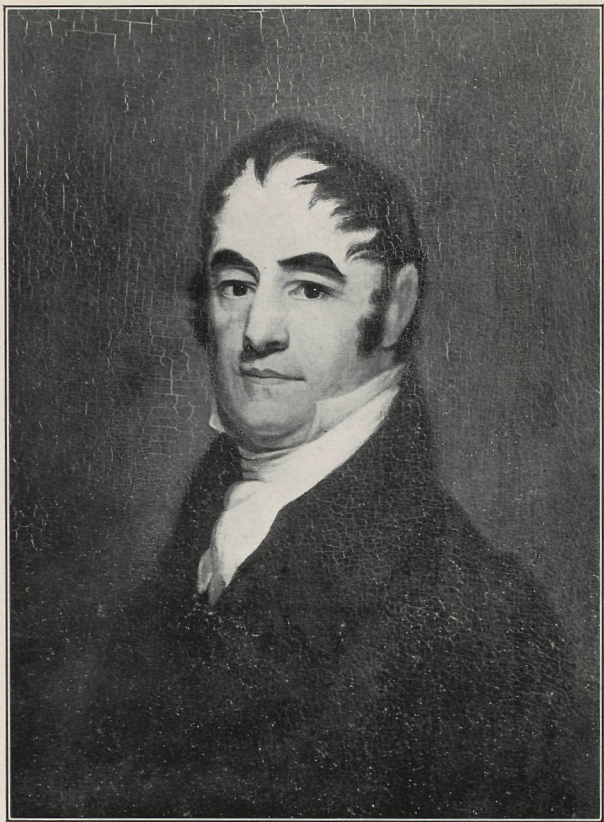
It was not until June, 1815, that the Common Council finally took action on the report of its committee, regarding the joint petition. Limitations of space alone prevent giving this remarkable paper in full. Grandiloquent and bombastic to a degree, it is typical of language then in vogue for purely formal addresses and documents. Such extracts as are here given will sound strange indeed to modern ears, so increasingly impatient of prolixity. The actual authorship of the production must remain divided amongst the collaborating committee, composed of Aldermen Peter Mesier, chairman, George Buckmaster, Nicholas Fish and Isaac S. Douglass, and Assistant-Alderman Augustine H. Lawrence, who declared the petition presented “for consideration a subject of immense importance.”

The city of New York, they assert, had made “such large and liberal contributions to the public exigencies, . . . that for credit & influence it has been contrasted with the supreme authority of some communities.” “Since, then,” they go on to ask, “such endeavour has



been manifested to extend the fame of the city for enterpridity, wealth and strength, ought not some attention be now directed to the fine & liberal arts?" There being no longer need "to provide for the tented field, would not a *garden spot*, in which the young plants of science might be cultivated, be a suitable & delectable first fruit offering to the *Goddess of Peace*?" Though "many have presumed, and ridicule has excited merriment in endeavouring to demonstrate, that such plants are here exotics, that our soil is sterile and unfit for such culture," yet "fortunately your petitioners have with great talent and perseverance proven them to be indigenous and the soil congenial to their nature. With considerable success they have already planted & nourished several; and, if the cultivation is only moistened with your friendly dew, these young trees will ere long exhibit a luxuriance and spread into a grove of science, under the shade of which your men of genius may securely repose."

"Sarcasm may perhaps with some effect direct its taunts, and censure justly condemn the neglect with which the elegant arts have hitherto been permitted to struggle," for "the citizens of New York have too long been stigmatized as phlegmatic, money making & plodding." Although "our Sister Cities deny we possess any taste for the sciences, and the total inattention to institutions of this class has ever been construed as an evidence of a want of genius itself," nevertheless, "materials requisite to erect splendid establishments in every department of the fine arts exist here in abundance." "The Petitioners have given an earnest of what may be anticipated, and, should they hap[p]ily be blessed with public patronage, such a stimulus will be given & such ranges



Anthony Bleeker

Trustee, 1810-1827. Secretary, 1816-1827





made in the field of science as to occupy a circumference difficult to be described."

As to the societies in question, "notwithstanding the adversities they have had to contend with, their deficiency of means, the want of countenance & above all the want of patronage, still their progress and advancement has astonished every one." Then reviewing each in turn, the report says of the Society Library that its entire collection, comprising "numerous scarce and valuable works not to be obtained on this side of the Atlantic," had "been made since the Revolutionary war by Gentlemen of the first taste & literary acquirements in our country"; and that, "by œconomy and a judicious administration of its finances, the committee of purchases" had been "enabled to enrich the collection with the most expensive works in the higher walks of literature." Also, should the petition be granted, it was purposed, "by disposing of their present building, to disencumber themselves of debt, and, by appropriating the surplus to further purchases, to enlarge still more this field of general literature."

Besides their present usefulness, the joint petitioners were planning, if favored, "to open an Athenæum or general reading room, to establish a professorship of mineralogy & Natural history, to provide a School for Painting, Sculpture & Architecture, . . . to furnish [a] Chymical Laboratory with an enlightened professor, & to reserve a Hall for anniversary discourses or forensic disputations; and thus render this assembly of literary Societies famous as an *Institute* of the elegant and liberal arts."

Thus "at your portal" these suppliants "kneel & anxiously solicit your assistance," says the peroration.

"United under one Roof, and thus enabled to converge their efforts," they would form "a constellation of science," sure to "illuminate our hemisphere." Indeed, "a temple diverging such splendid rays" would "dispell every gloom and impart activity to the germs of genius however obscurely planted"; while "an intellectual Commerce, extending to every quarter of the globe," would "from this center of intelligence be industriously pursued, and the returns of mental treasures enrich our citizens beyond calculation."

In conclusion,—inasmuch as "the blessing of peace will have a benign influence on Science and Literature, the Common Council ought to perpetuate the auspicious event in the memory of the wise & good by an act of munificence which will create an æra in our history & erect an illustrious monument to their patriotism & intelligence,"—the report recommends that "the spacious building in the rear of the City Hall"—the old almshouse—be appropriated to the petitioning societies. It was thereupon so ordered by a vote of thirteen to four, the length of the term to be "not less than seven nor more than twenty-one years."

Although gratified at this gracious action, and minded at first "to receive the said Lease," the Trustees presently found on investigation that a larger sum was required to adapt the old apartments to library purposes than their exchequer warranted expending. Furthermore, "taking into consideration the improbability of their being able to dispose of the Library building on advantageous terms, and believing that, by making alterations in the lower apartments of the same, sufficient conveniences" might be secured at less expense, they voted in November, 1816, to surrender the lease to

the Common Council. In executing this order Secretary Bleecker courteously added: "Whilst the Trustees of the Library regret the circumstances which impel them to resign the lease, they will still retain a grateful sense of the favor and patronage of the Corporation in having originally granted the same in compliance with their solicitations."<sup>1</sup> Further appreciation may have been meant in the election of John Ferguson—mayor at the time the leases were voted—to the board of Trustees of the Library, a position he held for over sixteen years.

All the other societies promptly availed themselves of the desired permission, the leases being for ten years, at a yearly rental of one peppercorn, "if lawfully demanded,"<sup>2</sup> and the name of the building was changed to The New York Institution. It was a three-story brick structure, erected in 1795 on the site of the present County Court House, slate-roofed, with a basement, and, according to Goodrich's "Picture of New-York," its exterior had "nothing attractive about it."

Thus the project came to naught, so far as the Library was concerned, possibly to the disappointment of some of its well-wishers. Doubtless, however, the majority of its members—no less than those now first learning of the plan—experienced a pleasurable relief that their own building would not have to be given up and the collections of the Society Library removed to the old almshouse!

It has been noticed that the above negotiations suggested simply a *coöperation* among the several literary and scientific institutions of the city. But in January, 1825, the Trustees were approached by Messrs. Richard

<sup>1</sup> MS. *Minutes of the Common Council*, Nov. 18, 1816.

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Historical Society*—1804-1904. P. 31.



Harison, William Johnson and Clement C. Moore in behalf of Columbia College, Dr. David Hosack, Anthony Bleecker and Colonel William L. Stone for the Historical Society, Professor James Renwick and William Gracie for the Athenæum, and a committee representing the Philharmonic Society, with the proposal "to confer together on the subject of a *union of Libraries.*" This project had been started by the Associates of the Athenæum, coincidentally with the opening of that institution in December, 1824.

Although the Trustees joined heartily in the movement—appointing John Ferguson, Dr. Drake and Dr. Rodgers to meet these gentlemen—nothing came of it. One after another the several committees reported "no progress" and were discharged. The death notice of the suggestion is found in the editorial columns of the *Commercial Advertiser* of May 4, 1825, where, in reply to the query of a correspondent,—“Why is not the noble plan of the founders of the Athenæum carried into effect, of uniting the libraries of our city into one?”—it is said that, though “the committees of the Athenæum, City Library and Historical Society had a friendly meeting several months since, and discussed the matter freely, no formidable objections or difficulties” being raised, yet “from that day to this the committees have not been called together.” It appears from the minutes of the Directors of the Athenæum for March that the “plan of union and building” had been abandoned, as they considered it “indelicate to go forward in the unsettled state of the affairs of the Athenæum.”<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, however,—in April, 1827,—the Athenæum renewed the subject, appointing Isaac S.

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the board of Directors of the Athenæum, March 4, 1825.

Hone, James I. Jones and John Delafield to negotiate again with the Society Library and Columbia College. Once more they designated committees—John J. Morgan, John Ferguson and Gulian C. Verplanck for the former and the Rev. Dr. William Harris, Bishop Hobart, the Rev. Dr. James M. Mathews, David S. Jones and William Johnson for the College. As before, however, the proposal ran amuck of the same spirit of indifference, or of no sentiment in its favor; it was not, however, until February, 1828, that the Columbia committee was discharged upon reporting that “no agreement was likely to be made upon the subject.”<sup>1</sup>

Before this attempt had died away, another movement had been begun to consolidate all the leading literary societies of the city. At a public meeting held in the Common Council chamber, May 17, 1827, Governor De Witt Clinton in the chair and Frederic De Peyster, Jr., acting as secretary, it was voted to apply “to the Corporation for a Lease of 99 years, of the Building now occupied as the New York Institution, to be appropriated”<sup>2</sup> for the purposes of the Academy of Arts, “the City Library,” the Athenæum, the Lyceum, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Historical Society, the Horticultural Society and the Law Library Association.

The project was received, as usual, with enthusiasm, a committee was appointed to enlist the support of the several institutions named, and Colonel John Trumbull

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the board of Trustees of Columbia College, Feb. 4, 1828.

<sup>2</sup> This and succeeding excerpts are from a paper in the possession of the Historical Society, penned by Frederic De Peyster, Jr., and endorsed as “Minutes of a Public

meeting held in the Chamber of the Common Council of the city of New York to concentrate the different Literary Institutions under one roof, and also of the proceedings of the Comē appointed thereat.”

"entered at large upon the subject of the plan and cost of the contemplated improvements in the Building referred to, . . . and exhibited a sketch of the proposed alterations, and of accommodations, which (if the design was carried out), could be furnished to the various Institutions disposed to unite in this important & highly interesting undertaking." But in a "Note" at the end of the proceedings, Secretary De Peyster wrote: "The proposed plan was finally abandoned, the anticipated aid not having been obtained, and small encouragement being held out by those most directly interested in the measures suggested for carrying out, fully and appropriately, a design so important to the various Institutions throughout the city, and to the public at large."

In the midst of this series of joint deliberations, the Trustees had steadily cherished hopes of a new location and home without encumbrance. In the spring of 1826, after some talk of asking the city fathers for the use of the Rotunda,<sup>1</sup> they voted to request of the Common Council the "grant of a lot of ground in a central part of the city," "for the purpose of erecting thereon a Library House instead of the present one." The city records contain no reference even to receiving a petition, nor do the Trustees' minutes again allude to the subject.

Two more years creep by, leaving the situation unchanged, when suddenly, in May, 1828, there comes a return to the identical position of fourteen years before in deputing Professor Renwick, Dr. John Augustine Smith and Mr. Morgan "to treat with the Corporation on the subject of obtaining apartments in the old Alms-

<sup>1</sup> The "Panoramic Rotunda," 52 feet in diameter and 30 feet high, had been erected by private enterprise on city property east of the

old almshouse in March, 1817. Upon the expiration of a nine-year lease the structure was to revert to the Corporation.



house for the use of the Library." This petition,<sup>1</sup> presented in conjunction with one from John Delafield, Henry Brevoort, Jr., and James I. Jones in behalf of

(9)  
The Library.

Another thing which is very much wanted here is a public Library, which would very much advance both learning and piety. Such there are at Charles Town in Carolina, Annapolis in Maryland, at Philadelphia and Boston. Some books have been formerly sent to New York but as far as that they remain in the hands of the Trustees.

- 1 This Library I would have to be public and provincial and to be open every day in the week at convenient hours.
- 2 That all men may have liberty to read in the Library at these hours.
- 3 That any person borrowing a book shall be obliged to deposit a certain sum of money which shall exceed the value of it and in case the book is not restored at the limited time, the money to be forfeited to buy another.
- 4 That no book shall be lent for a longer term than a year - where the distance is greatest.
- 5 That the right of the Library and use of the books be given gratis, but every person borrowing shall sign to a receipt or obligation to return it at such a time and for this the Librarian shall receive 6d.
- 6 A book of subscriptions, Donations &c to this Library shall be on the table where it may be lawful for others to subscribe books or money.

Page (reduced) from Sharpe proposals for "A Public Library." See pp. 54-57.

<sup>1</sup> Printed copy in minutes of Historical Society trustees, May, 1828.

the Athenæum, was addressed "To the Hon. the Mayor, Aldermen, and Commonalty of the City of New-York." In a word, it respectfully asked for apartments in the Institution, "without prejudice to the Corporate Institutions already settled there by the liberality of the Corporation," at the same time offering, in return, "to decorate and embellish" the exterior of the building.

A comprehensive résumé of both the Library and the Athenæum appears in this elaborate petition. "The Society Library," it says, was "among the most ancient Corporations of our City and was considered, from the importance of the purposes it was intended to subserve, at an early period in its history, worthy of being permitted to occupy apartments in the Public Hall of the City." "Nearly five hundred whole families" were then "entitled to the privilege of its circulation," while a collection of nearly 20,000 volumes had been accumulated. But the building was "in truth, rather in the midst of uninhabited places of business than a resident population." Lastly, "a Library accessible upon the cheapest possible terms" was "the most valuable auxiliary to the dissemination of knowledge."

Despite the fact that the Common Council received supplementary memorials from some of the societies already within the Institution, as well as from "residents in the vicinity of the Park, stating that the building denominated the Institution is in a dilapidated state, and that the most conspicuous part of it is devoted to a use not entitled to public patronage,"—despite all this, the subject never came up for action at all—the most trying of all fates to anxiously waiting suppliants. The reason for withholding consent, however, presumably lay in the fact that the authorities were planning to use the build-

ing in question for other purposes, for in March, 1829, they ordered notice sent "to all the occupants of apartments in the buildings in Chamber street" to vacate the rooms before August.<sup>1</sup>

So the situation at the close of the quarter-century may best be summed up in this extract from the Library Committee report for February, 1829: "Negotiations with Columbia College and the Application to the Corporation of the City for ground for the erection of a building for the Library in a more central position may be considered as having failed. These applications were made in conjunction with the Athenæum, which institution has lately connected itself with another and purchased ground for building.<sup>2</sup> The New York Society Library is therefore thrown back upon its own resources & to the building it has so long owned."

In all this time a few changes had inevitably taken place among the officers of the Library. The secretaryship—filled for twenty-one years by John Forbes in conjunction with his duties as Librarian—it was voted in May, 1815, should thereafter be held by a member of the board, John Pintard receiving the appointment. No doubt the Trustees decided they would feel freer to discuss matters, especially such as related to the Librarian, in the absence of that functionary. A year later Mr. Pintard was succeeded by Anthony Bleecker, who remained at the post until his death in March, 1827,—a period of nearly eleven years. He in turn was followed by Evert A. Bancker, who served for a full decade, the major part of his term falling without the bounds of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> MS. *Minutes of the Common Council*, March 23, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> The Clinton Hall Association; but see pp. 331-332.



The position of Treasurer continued to be held by a member of the board. Daniel Phoenix, who had been appointed in January, 1796, resigned in May, 1810, leaving a deal of expert accounting to be done by his successor, Edward W. Laight. The finances of the institution were certainly in chaos, as will soon be noted, and discouragements continued to beset the management; but, whether through high-minded devotion or from a sense of personal pride,—probably both,—General Laight conducted the fiscal affairs of the corporation in this gratuitous office during a trying stretch of sixteen years. He was succeeded by John J. Morgan in May, 1826.

Before reviewing briefly the financial concerns of the Library for these years, a word should be said about the shares or rights, their purchase, sale, forfeiture and varying price, as also about changes in the annual payment charge. In regard to the last item, it will be recalled that in May, 1802, the yearly dues had been advanced with legislative sanction to \$2.50. This amendment remained in force for seventeen years, when again, with the hope of recouping their low fortunes, the Trustees applied to the legislature for leave to raise the annual payment to \$4, which became the established rate in May, 1819.

The price of a share or right was \$20 from March, 1793, till May, 1810, when it was increased to \$25. A fortnight later, however, aroused by the plain speech of Dr. Wilson's report on the finances, the figure was set at \$30. Again, in December, 1812, it was raised to \$40, at which height it remained until May, 1824, when—very possibly in consequence of rumors of the movement that presently resulted in founding the Athenæum—it was reduced once more to \$25.

Notice of this reduction was inserted in the daily papers for six weeks, beginning with May 29th. It declared that the "sole motive" of the Trustees was their "desire of extending the usefulness of the institution" and of "making it more generally accessible." The collection, "much more extensive and valuable than ever," included about 16,000 volumes, "comprehending the most valuable works in science, theology, and classical literature, together with a very complete collection of encyclopedias, dictionaries, reviews, magazines, registers, and similar works of reference and amusement." In conclusion, "useful and valuable books" would be received in payment, at what would to-day be called library rates, or, if the purchaser should prefer, the purchase money would be applied "to the procuring of such books" as he might recommend. Only one instance is recorded during this period, however, of a proposal to acquire a share by an equivalent other than the coin of the realm. In April, 1813, "on an application of Mr Elias Hicks to give certain news papers in part payment for a share," it was voted that they were "not of a kind to be useful to the Library."

As to arrears and resulting forfeitures, committee reports prove they were indeed a feature to be reckoned with. It was only to be expected in the course of human events, and many of them lapsed forever, despite efforts to reclaim such errant members on favorable terms. For example, in April, 1814, with the price of shares \$40, it was decreed that the payment of arrears in full, or the sum of \$20 for each share before August, would entitle a former shareholder to a new certificate. In this way a number of lapsed rights were brought again to an active status. As a general rule, the charter provision was

quoted in arrearage cases, that failure to pay dues within thirty days forfeited membership, but that settlement of arrears within five years would bring restoration of privileges.

Not until after the shock of the illegal election of 1825 are names of new members entered in the minutes, some purchasing shares and others receiving admittance on the assignment of former shareholders, "according to the Charter." In the gloomy Library Committee report of February, 1828, about thirty shares were "in a course of forfeiture." But in the joyous statement of a year later, with which this period closes, first among gratifying items is recorded "the sale of shares."

Now comes, last of all, the least entertaining but the truly fundamental interest of each epoch in turn—the financial side. It must be admitted, however, that it did not give the Trustees much concern during the first half-dozen years of this period. At the May meeting the new board would perfunctorily appoint one or more members "to audit the accounts of this Society for the last year," but there the matter ended. No reports were entered, and even the custom itself fell into disuse, until revived by the reformatory by-laws of 1812. It again lapsed, however, for a special committee's report on finances in May, 1825, complains that the practice, "wholesome as it is, has been rarely attended to." After 1828 this task was taken over by the Library Committee.

Consequently, during a large part of the time the board must have acquiesced in such oral statements as were made by the Treasurer, thus maintaining a *laissez-faire* policy. It was not until April, 1809, that any apparent thought for the morrow seems to have been taken. Aroused by we know not what, Professor Wil-



son, Dr. Mitchill and General Clarkson were directed "to inquire into the present State of the Library, its funds, and its affairs in general." Though they were asked to report at the next meeting, more than a twelve-month passed before their desired statement came.

Pending the result of the investigation, we may be diverted—no less than the participators themselves—by a little dabbling in stocks on the part of the Trustees. With "Bishop Moore in the Chair," (!) Charles Wilkes and Dr. Mitchill were requested "to subscribe to the Stock of the Mutual Assurance Company for as many shares in the said Stock as this Society may be entitled to," and authorized "to borrow from the Bank of New York" any sum needed under \$1300. Nearly a year later, in April, 1810,—though at their next meeting—"it appears there had been made a clear gain for the Library of \$159.02." But this fabulous profit had already been spent, as Dr. Kemp was deputed to pay it to Peter A. Mesier, bookseller, on account.

Finally, in May, 1810, "Dr. Wilson, from the Committee appointed to inquire into the State of the Library,"—Peter A. Jay and John Pintard having been appointed his associates in place of Dr. Mitchill and General Clarkson, retired,—rendered a report that covers nearly four folio pages in the minutes. It is by no means cheerful reading. First of all, the list of subscribers had fallen from 965 in 1794 to but 659 in 1810 (oddly enough in appearance but a transposition of the figures). The debts, in the second place, amounted to \$4306.15. Next, a comparison of the annual expenses with the yearly revenue left a balance of but \$742.52 "for purchasing Books." Lastly, estimating the building and its furnishings as worth \$18,000, and the 10,196

books at, "say," \$22,000, "the Capital Stock of the Society" approximated \$40,000, so that the 659 shares had a value of about \$60, each. Therefore, "in justice to the old subscribers," the price of shares—then \$20—ought to be raised to at least \$30, the report suggests. Closing with several specific recommendations for future conduct, the committee sternly rebukes "the culpable neglect . . . in the collection of the annual dues, whereby so large a Sum as \$2396<sup>25</sup>/<sub>100</sub> is totally lost, and a proportion of the balance [\$1630] may be difficult to recover."

Profoundly moved by this relentless diagnosis, the board at once took action, in accord with its suggestions, by raising the price of shares to \$30, by appointing Messrs. Pintard, Bleecker and Verplanck—the last-named only just elected a Trustee, at the age of twenty-four—a special purchasing committee, and by ordering the Librarian to attend to the collecting without delay, and to render an accounting at each meeting. Good results appeared at the next session, a month later; but then came a series of nine failures to secure a quorum.

An important measure was initiated in June, 1811, in appointing Treasurer Laight and Gulian C. Verplanck to ascertain Mr. Winter's price for the lot on which the building stood, the committee being authorized "to give up the Covenant," whereby Mr. Winter was "bound not to erect any building within ten feet of the southerly side of the Library Building," provided he should convey to the Trustees, forever, all his lands in the rear of the Library lot, so as to carry it to the land of Brockholst Livingston, "of equal width with the Library Building." The committee was also requested to learn at what rate the required sum might be borrowed from the Bank of New York.



Hon. Gulian Crommelin Verplanck, L.L.D.  
Trustee, 1810-1855; 1857-1870. Chairman, 1858-1870





When it was found that Mr. Winter would "sell his right in the ground or rent charge on the Library lot for \$2250,"—though declining to make any agreement concerning the above covenant or "exchanging the ground in the rear,"—the board voted to accept his terms, provided the required sum could be borrowed from the bank at six per cent. All progressing satisfactorily, the papers were signed with despatch on June 18th. By these transactions the Library was a gainer in two respects: an interest charge of \$135 was substituted for the former ground rent of \$175; and still more profitably, in the long run, it thus became owner of a piece of real estate destined to eventual rise in value.

But the standing indebtedness of the institution was considerably augmented, of course. Six months afterward it amounted to \$6643.75, and by April, 1814, it had risen to \$8208.33, the chief items being the old bond of \$3000 at five per cent., the \$2250-bond and mortgage at six per cent.,—both to the Bank of New York,—\$2185.25 due to "Book sellers, &c.," and \$773.08 due to the Librarian—poor man! Partly alive to the pressing need of retrenchment, the board voted to buy no books nor disburse a cent beyond necessary expenses, until these last two sums should be paid off.

Darker and more depressing grew the outlook, until, in February, 1818, in sheer despair the distracted board authorized John J. Morgan, David S. Jones and Anthony Bleecker "to prepare and present to the Legislature a petition for a grant of money for the benefit of the Library." The last heard of this effort was that the petition had been referred to a committee of the assembly. Pigeonholed! The Society Library has never since been a suppliant for public aid.

Again several years pass with no direct allusion to matters of finance. Finally, in February, 1821, comes a Library Committee report on "the property, funds and debts of the Society," by which it appears that the debt had by strict economy—together with the increased income from raising the yearly dues—been reduced to the amount of the bonds and mortgage. The books, commendably increased to 13,917 volumes, were valued at \$24,595; but it is astonishing to find the building and lot together estimated at only \$15,000,—“a proper valuation,”—when the building, with only furnishings included, was deemed worth \$18,000 in 1810. The number of shares had fallen to 616, which, at the advanced rate of \$4-a-year dues, yielded \$2464, “the only fund for the support and increase of the Library.” Nevertheless, the committee submitted the report “with pleasure,” for “compared with former times it presents a very gratifying view,” the “favorable change” being attributed to the increase in the annual payment charge.

Subsequent reports show successive ups and downs, until February, 1828, when the most dismal statement of all was rendered. To begin with, the widely heralded imported books—for whose purchase \$1000 had been borrowed in 1825—had ultimately cost even more, leaving the Library “much straitened in its means.” Then a tax of \$321—happily reduced from the original assessment of \$670, “by the earnest and able exertions” of David S. Jones, John Ferguson and Evert A. Bancker—had been levied on the extension of Nassau street (at which time the numbering of the houses was rearranged, the Library being changed from no. 16 to no. 33). Furthermore, of the shares—now fallen to 482 in number—only about 450 would probably pay their dues. In short,



but \$64 could be counted on “for the purchase of books, binding of books, insurance, fuel, repairs and contingent expenses,” for the ensuing year. The report, signed by John J. Morgan alone, concludes with recommending the adoption of a plan already broached, to devote the \$450 derived from office rents to a sinking fund toward extinguishing the debt to the bank.

This measure was again urged in the extended Library Committee report of February, 1829, whereupon the board at once voted to appropriate that part of the income, together with a sum equal to the annual interest on the bank debt, as a sinking fund toward its discharge. This report’s bright auguries, then, based on figures, will fittingly serve as a valedictory to this chapter, marking the conclusion of the seventy-fifth year in the history of the Society Library.

In this report the institution was “pronounced free from debt,”—“with the exception of the old debt to the Bank of New York,”—“with a considerable balance in the hands of the Treasurer.” This “prosperous state of affairs”—“so different from that of former years”—was attributable not to the purchase of fewer books (“within the last two years more books, & costly books too,” had been acquired than in the five years before), but to the efficient measures for collecting dues, to a rigid economy, and to the reduced salary of the Librarian, “which salary the Committee think still a very handsome one.”<sup>1</sup>

After touching upon other matters of moment, elsewhere discussed, the address closes with this peroration, undoubtedly the production of Mr. Morgan:

<sup>1</sup> See p. 278.

The Committee will not refrain from indulging for a moment the feelings of an honest pride. This Library was founded and has been sustained by the equal contributions of its members ; it has received no State or City aid ; it has solicited no rich man's donation ; and it has successfully resisted the assaults of speculators upon its literary existence. The Institution has gone on silently and steadily to the acquisition of a large and excellent building and to the collection of nearly 25,000 Volumes of books, thus forming a Library which perhaps is not surpassed in the United States, and which certainly has nothing at all equal to it in the State where it is established.

## VII

### THE NEW YORK ATHENÆUM, 1824—1839

THE subject now claiming attention is already somewhat familiar, in name at least. In this chapter it is purposed to recount the origin and something of the management of the Athenæum, as well as the terms of the agreement under which it was finally merged into the Society Library. Such a treatment is justifiable on the double ground of pertinency to the main theme and of bringing to light an important but well-nigh forgotten interest, once dear to the hearts of New York's leading citizens, and which, for a few years, was manifestly the chief literary asset of the community.

Although the Athenæum was formally established in 1824, its real genesis may be traced to an earlier date. Its model was the Liverpool Athenæum, founded in 1798 and conducted with such immediate and signal success. The plan was first adopted in this country in January, 1807, in the opening of the Boston Athenæum, Philadelphia following suit in March, 1814. The general scheme of these institutions embraced, in addition to a library (chiefly for general reference), a reading room to contain newspapers and magazines; a cabinet or museum; a laboratory for scientific experiments; and a lecture department.



Meanwhile there had been signs of a similar movement in New York. Besides the Society Library and the various booksellers' libraries<sup>1</sup> of more or less fleeting patronage, there was advertised in 1804 the Select Library Society, whose object was "to procure religious and moral publications, as well as History, Voyages, Travels, &c. in order to disseminate useful knowledge, and to contribute to the comfort and interest of those eminent characters, whose time and talents are devoted to the dignified purpose 'of giving ardour to virtue and confidence to truth.'"<sup>2</sup> Again, in November, 1809, a reading room was opened in the Government House, with at least forty subscribers, of whom John Pintard seems to have been the moving spirit, others being De Witt Clinton, G. C. Verplanck, Washington Irving, Archibald Bruce, M.D., General Morton, Dr. Mitchill, Charles Wilkes, General Laight, Abraham Schermerhorn, Dr. David Hosack, the Rev. Samuel Miller and the Rev. Dr. John M. Mason. About a dozen periodicals are named, one Valleau acting as attendant.<sup>3</sup> Both of these enterprises were short-lived.

In January, 1810, John Howard Payne, later to win enduring fame as the author of "Home, Sweet Home," then only in his nineteenth year, opened an establishment at no. 2 Broadway, "in front of the City Hotel," which he called a "Literary Exchange," and which he hoped would soon equal the Boston Athenæum. It was "intended for a general depository of Newspapers, Mag-

<sup>1</sup> *E. g.*, in 1802, "H. Caritat's Book-Store, Literary Assembly Room, and Circulating Library, No. 1, City Hotel, Fenelon's Head, Broadway"; in 1809, "The Albion Library, No. 13 Park," for reference only, "daily open, on the most

reasonable terms"; and, in 1810, Goodrich's Circulating Library, 124 Broadway.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Directory, 1804.

<sup>3</sup> From a MS. memorandum by John Pintard, now in the possession of Mrs. E. B. Servoss, New York.

azines, and Pamphlets, both political, literary and scientific," of this country, as also of "the principal European Miscellanies, and all Pamphlets, either foreign or domestick, which may excite attention." Thus would the institution be "an attractive rendezvous for the merchant, as well as the man of letters."<sup>1</sup> The subscription price of ten dollars a year, "requested in advance," may or may not have interfered with its success. In his letter of August, 1812, to Mayor Clinton, above quoted,<sup>2</sup> John Pintard wrote of this project: "Nothing but the depression occasioned by the state of our public affairs could have interfered with the establishment of an Athenæum in this city, two years ago."

In this same communication, in which it will be recalled he had ineffectually urged his friend to further efforts to house all the literary institutions of the city in one of its own buildings, Mr. Pintard adds, that "the establishment of an Athenæum or public reading room" was also proposed, as "an important appendage to the City Library & Historical Society," to "furnish our fellow citizens with every resource to gratify rational & liberal curiosity." Not only would "strangers & visitors be accommodated with a genteel place of resort for literary, political & general information," but "the great benefits that will result to society from the acquisition & preservation of foreign & domestic gazettes, periodical & political publications, together with globes, maps, charts, Atlases &c &c may be easily conceived."

The next move in this direction seems to have been

<sup>1</sup> See Gabriel Harrison. *Life and Writings of John Howard Payne*. Philadelphia, 1885. These quotations are taken from a fragmentary newspaper clipping, date and name of journal not given, in a scrap-

book at the Boston Athenæum, entitled "Notes, Comments, etc." Vol. I, p. 2. See also the *New York Columbian*, Jan. 12, 1810.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 290-291, 292-293.

more of a business undertaking, as appears from an entry in Mr. Pintard's diary for February 14, 1814, as follows: "Mess<sup>rs</sup> Eastburn, Kirk & C<sup>o</sup>[']s] new Literary Rooms at the corner of Wall Street & Nassau, on the site of the old City Hall, were opened this day at 12 o'clock. A discourse on the utility of public reading rooms was delivered on the occasion by M<sup>r</sup> Bristed one of the Subscribers. This is a splendid & honourable establishment, w<sup>ch</sup> has met with very laudable patronage." In 1817 this institution, originated by one Sargeant, a bookseller, was located on Broadway, at the corner of Pine street; but it also failed to enlist a very general support.

Within a few years, however, there came a change. Wounds inflicted upon industry by the War of 1812 fast turned to unheeded scars; New York was soon again on its bounding course toward predestined supremacy in population and wealth. These strides in local prosperity seem happily to have been attended, or closely followed, by a deepening inclination to reflect soberly on involved responsibilities. Men felt constrained to look more searchingly to themselves, their manners and their minds (as well as to their creature wants), and to their fellows, no less. The period from 1814 to 1830 may fairly be characterized as an age of foundations. Under the influence of a steadily growing humanizing spirit, there began to flourish asylums for the bodily and mentally infirm, institutions to encourage thrift and saving among working people, societies for the relief of the poor and destitute, and a determined effort to ameliorate the moral and physical condition of public offenders.

Furthermore, this moral awakening was accompanied,



if not caused, by an intellectual stir and renaissance. The growth of American democracy, the discussion of socialistic views, a reaction against the hitherto accepted tenets of theology,—these played a part in stimulating desire



Second bookplate of the Society Library, by Maverick (facsimile size). See p. 213.

for knowledge and for its dissemination. Promptings of this nature accordingly led to the formation of such associations as the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Lyceum of Natural History, the New York Law Institute, the American Bible Society, the various Episcopal theological societies that culminated in the establishment of the General Seminary, the Mercantile and Apprentices' Libraries, and other institutions of similar purport. But of them all the one which seems to have attracted most wide-spread attention, and which certainly gathered unto itself the support of the community to a remarkable degree, was the New York Athenæum.

Of individual efforts leading to its actual inception, however, little can now be told. The Society Library has the book of minutes of the Directors of the Athenæum, but that particular body was not called into being until January, 1825. In a previous chapter mention was made of a general discontent, voiced by the newspapers in January, 1824, because the Society Library did not keep later hours, or have a reading room supplied with the principal journals and magazines.<sup>1</sup>

In March, 1824, while this subject was still fresh in the public mind, it is said that one day there dined together at the City Hotel on Broadway, near Trinity Church, a notable company of gentlemen, including Henry Brevoort, Jr., James Cooper, the Hon. Churchill C. Cambreling, William Gracie, Bishop Hobart, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Murray Hoffman, Dr. David Hosack, Washington Irving, Chancellor Kent, the Hon. Rufus King, James K. Paulding, Professor Renwick, Gulian C. Verplanck, and the Hon. Henry Wheaton. It was not a chance gathering; the special object of this assem-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 275.

blage of learning, wealth and talent was to discuss the propriety of establishing in New York city an institution for the promotion of literature and science. They informally but unanimously agreed that such an association was needed and should be founded.<sup>1</sup>

Of what next took place, or of proceedings during the ensuing few weeks, all trace, and even recollection, is long since lost. When notice of the institution first appeared in print, two months later, it was well under way, with an imposing array of fifty-nine supporters.

The salutatory address of this new candidate for popular favor, directed "TO THE PUBLIC," bears date of June 1, 1824. Published in a twelve-page pamphlet,<sup>2</sup> from the press of J. W. Palmer & Co., corner of Wall and Broad streets, it contains also a "Constitution" in nine articles, and the names of fifty-nine "Associates," persons prominent in the community for their cultivated tastes, "including several of the reverend Clergy, and Professors of our Colleges."<sup>3</sup> Among them, besides the names already given as presumable originators, should be mentioned the Rev. Drs. William Harris, James M. Mathews and John F. Schroeder, Drs. James E. De Kay, John W. Francis, William James MacNeven, Samuel L. Mitchill and Wright Post, Asher B. Durand and William Dunlap, artists, Peter A. Jay, Charles King, Clement C. Moore, Nathaniel F. Moore, John J. Morgan, General Jacob Morton and Robert C. Sands.

<sup>1</sup> Basis for these statements is an article in *The New York Times* for June 15, 1901, by Gen. James Grant Wilson, based in turn on his recollections of what Gulian C. Verplanck, the last survivor of the meeting, himself recalled. General Wilson errs, however, in stating that Washington Irving was of the

number, or, at least, that he became an Associate, and confuses James Cooper, Esq., with "Fenimore" Cooper. There is no evidence to show the latter was ever a member.

<sup>2</sup> A single copy is in the Library of the Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> From an editorial comment in the *American* for June 3, 1824.



Space and time preclude giving the Address here in full, though covering but six small pages. It begins with stating the long-felt want of a "Public Institution for the cultivation of Literature and Science, and by which a taste for such pursuits might be awakened and preserved in activity among our citizens." Following this comes the usual unfavorable comparison of New York with "sister cities of our own republic," and with "the commercial and manufacturing marts of the European continent," notably Liverpool, in the support of such establishments. An appeal is made to "the well-known liberality of their fellow citizens" by the Associates, "persons of literary and scientific pursuits," imbued with "a just sense of the dignity of the city." Say they: "The wealth derived from commerce may vanish; the pride of monied opulence may be checked; but the works of genius, the productions of learning, and the monuments of taste, are indestructible and unfading."

Next are set forth the "objects and motives" of the Association under several heads. Some of the Associates were to give "public discourses," to "detail the progress of those branches of literature and science . . . most intimately connected with their individual pursuits." Courses of "popular lectures" were promised, "open to both sexes," and arranged "for the sake of the pleasure they produce, and the agreeable relaxation they afford from the cares of domestic life, the dissipation of the fashionable world, and the turmoil of business."

Another aim was "to procure and furnish to its supporters the whole of the works, whether periodical or standard, that hourly issue from the presses of America and Europe"! There was contemplated, further, "a

library of scientific reference," to comprise "all the standard elementary works of literature and science of every age and nation"! Nor did they "despair of accomplishing it," should they arouse New York "to a sense of the importance of their plan to its honour and prosperity."

Again, several of the lecturers agreed to contribute "collections of specimens, and apparatus illustrative of the courses they may be appointed to deliver." "Additions and improvements," demanded by "the progress of science," were to be paid for "from the common stock," thus creating "permanent collections, the property of the association."

In conclusion, "the plan, being intended to embrace every valuable object of curiosity, would require much time to expose in all its ramifications." The purpose is distinctly stated to be "based upon no views of private or individual emolument," the lecturers seeking "no other reward for their exertions, than the reputation they may have an opportunity of acquiring, and the pleasure they must derive from being instrumental in establishing a useful institution."

This eloquent appeal is signed in behalf of the Associates by a committee of four, Professor James Renwick of the Columbia faculty, at that time a Trustee of the Society Library, William Gracie, an eminent merchant and a trustee of the Historical Society, John Smyth Rogers, M.D., and Dr. Frederick Gore King, youngest son of the Hon. Rufus King. Though then but twenty-three years of age, he was already house-surgeon at the New York Hospital. At the time of his early death, but a few years later, he was professor of anatomy in the National Academy of Design and as-

sured of a brilliant future in his profession. Appleton's Encyclopædia says of him: "He was one of the first to give popular lectures on professional subjects." This service he was enabled to render, like others of his day, under the auspices of the New York Athenæum.

From a modern point of view, not the least noteworthy feature of the above Address is the contemplated admission of women to the lectures, with the expressed assurance "that the ladies of New-York will thus be enabled to pursue studies, and investigate subjects, from which, by the present system of education, they are excluded." Oddly enough, however, this particular proposition, seemingly so in advance of the times, receives no recognition from the current press.

The project met with a prompt and cordial endorsement. Such is the burden of an editorial article in the *New-York American* for June 3d, which was, in essence, "to hope, that objects so worthy, and expectations so reasonable and disinterested, will not be urged in vain upon our community." The *Evening Post* for the next day contains a communication from "X," who, after reviewing the proposals in outline, concludes thus enthusiastically: "I confess, sir, that upon this subject, I feel a local pride, which I cannot repress."

On June 10th, a meeting of the Associates in the chapel of Columbia College, "for the purpose of organizing the institution," resulted in the following elections: The Rev. William Harris, D.D., President; the Rev. Jonathan M. Wainwright, Prof. James Renwick, Peter A. Jay, Esq., and the Rev. Dr. James M. Mathews, Vice-Presidents; William Gracie, Corresponding Secretary; John Delafield, Jr., Treasurer; and John R. Rhineland, M.D., Curator. Committees were then



deputed "to devise a system of Lectures, the establishment of a Reading Room and Library, to report lecturers to the Institution, and to obtain from the Legislature a charter of incorporation." <sup>1</sup>

Rummaging through newspaper files reveals occasional summonings of the Associates; though, as stated above, no records of such meetings have survived. They were regularly held in the chapel of Columbia College, then situated "at the foot of Park Place," the little city directory announces. By fall, a second prospectus<sup>2</sup> was issued, covering twenty pages and containing, in addition, the by-laws, a "General Scheme of Subjects for Lectures," and the plan of lectures for 1825.

Matters progressed satisfactorily, for, in the *American* of November 18th, subscribers were duly notified to "receive their tickets of admission to the Lectures of the Institution on application to the Treasurer." In the meantime, the Association had received notice of a resolution by the trustees of Columbia College, on November 1st, that the Athenæum be allowed "the use of the college chapel, as requested by them, from the 30<sup>th</sup> of November next until the further order of this Board." <sup>3</sup>

In recognition of this courtesy, which was renewed as long as the Athenæum's lectures were maintained, its Directors voted to regard the college trustees and their families on the same footing as regular subscribers, and gave the Senior class free admission to the courses. They also agreed to pay the cost of "lamplight" and "any

<sup>1</sup> See the *American* and the *Post* for June 11, 1824.

<sup>2</sup> Copies of this announcement may be seen in the Libraries of both the Historical Society and Columbia

University. It is addressed "To the Publick," under date of June 1st, as before.

<sup>3</sup> From the minutes of the trustees of Columbia College.

damage or dilapidation consequent upon such use" of the chapel.

Toward the end of the year, appeared a third pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> similar in all respects to the last, but showing an Associate membership increased to seventy-nine. It also bears the imprint of J. W. Palmer & Co., now proudly styling themselves "Printers to the New-York Athenæum."

The long-heralded opening came at last on Monday, December 13, 1824, at one o'clock, in the assembly room of the City Hotel, 123 Broadway. The *American* of December 11th announces that:

The Rev. the Clergy, the Judges of the Supreme and State Courts, the Honourable the Mayor and Corporation, the Trustees of Columbia College, the Professors and Students of the Theological Seminary, the Members of the Literary Societies of the city, the Members of the Academy of Fine Arts, the President, Vice-Presidents, Secretary and Members of the Chamber of Commerce are invited, all persons friendly to the Institution are requested to attend. Seats in the body of the room reserved for Ladies.

Full accounts of the great event, duly chronicled in current journals, bear witness to the profound impression produced, the *American* coming first with a glowing panegyric. Its columns record that, despite "the unfavorable state of the weather, a large assemblage of ladies and gentlemen was collected at an early hour," and that "the members of the Athenæum, preceded by their President, Dr. Harris, who was accompanied by Mr. Talmadge, the Lieut.-Governor elect, entered . . .

<sup>1</sup> A copy is in the Library of Columbia University. It is this third issue that General Wilson describes in his article in the *Times*

for June 15, 1901, as the original "small brochure of twenty octavo pages." The date, June 1st, is repeated, as before.



Rt. Rev. John Henry Hobart, D.D., S.T.D.

Trustee, 1811-1830





and took the seats prepared for them on the stage." Presently the Hon. Henry Wheaton, LL.D., long an authority on international law, was introduced, who,

in a very appropriate, well reasoned, and eloquent discourse, explained the objects of the institution, its hopes, and aims. He traced the progress of the American mind, through all the trials and perils of the Revolution, and its sure and steady course amidst the wants and occupations that surrounded us, as a new and comparatively a poor people, concluding with an exhortation that now that wealth had crowned the efforts of American enterprise, some part of it might be appropriated to the fostering of those institutions, that are calculated to adorn, to dignify and to exalt the character of our republic.<sup>1</sup>

The ensuing lectures, according to the newspaper announcements, were divided into classes and delivered in the following order:

Class I—Greek Literature, Prof. Nathaniel F. Moore; Architecture, Dr. R. Greenhow; History of the Philosophy of the Mind, Prof. John McVickar. Class II—Eloquence, the Rev. Dr. Wainwright; Geology, Dr. Jeremiah Van Rensselaer; Applied Mechanics, Professor Renwick. Class III—Oriental Literature, the Rev. John F. Schroeder; Applied Chemistry, Dr. William J. MacNeven; Zoölogy, Dr. James E. DeKay; Phrenology and Anatomy of Expression, Dr. Frederick G. King. Class IV—Political Economy, Gulian C. Verplanck; Elementary Chemistry, J. Smyth Rogers, M. D.; Botany, Abraham Halsey; Poetry, G. W. Doane; Painting, John Trumbull.

Flattering press notices chronicle the early sessions. For instance, Professor Moore, before "a very numer-

<sup>1</sup> This address, printed by request, proved so popular that within a year a second edition was published, of which the Society Library owns an author's presentation copy. It is prefaced with reciprocal resolu-

tions of good will between the new institution and the Liverpool Royal Institution, an interesting consequence of the close commercial relations obtaining between the two trade centers.

ous auditory, among whom were nearly one hundred ladies, distinguished for fashion, beauty and accomplishments,"<sup>1</sup> "forgot the technicalities of the professorial chair, and discoursed in polished periods on the genius, taste and general literature of the Greeks, . . . and [on] the peculiarities of a language in which Demosthenes thundered, Plato reasoned, and Anacreon and Sappho 'loved and sung.'"<sup>2</sup> Further, "should the other lecturers treat their subjects with but half the ingenuity, learning and talent evinced by Mr. Moore, they will not fail to attain the objects of their association."<sup>3</sup>

In consequence of business men being unable to attend this lecture, the time was changed from one to six o'clock, an hour presumed to "interfere with no necessary engagements," and to "afford our fashionables time to dress for their evening engagements after its expiration."<sup>4</sup> In explanation of this last, it should be stated that bankers and merchants then went early to their counting-houses, returning for breakfast at eight o'clock, and for dinner at three; the prevailing supper hour was nine o'clock. Homes and business houses were so near to one another, that even the affluent usually walked to and from their daily concerns.

Plainly bent on striking for support while general enthusiasm was in a glow, the management, over the signatures of such commercial stalwarts as William Bayard, William W. Woolsey, Isaac Carow, Henry C. De Rham, Isaac Lawrence, John Hone, James Boorman, Jonathan Goodhue, George Griswold and William B. Astor, called a meeting of "the merchants and

<sup>1</sup> The *American*, December 17, 1824.

<sup>2</sup> From the *Statesman*, December 16th.

<sup>3</sup> From the *American*, December 17th.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



all others friendly to the institution" on December 29th, at the City Assembly Room.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the whole editorial weight of the *American* was brought into play to win a deserved recognition for the Athenæum. An entire column of its issue for December 28th is devoted to rehearsing the shameful literary sloth in New York and the high aims newly and so auspiciously professed, "not for the benefit of learned ease," but for "real and practical utility." It is suggestively urged, in true Addisonian style, that, "at the courses of lectures on practical subjects, many a mind unconscious of its powers, or at least of its particular bent, may catch the ethereal spark which shall light up its fires. Many a listener, who goes in from fashion, from listlessness, from ennui, may depart with instruction, and return with delight."

Stirred by these dignified entreaties, the citizens responded in what would to-day be called a "Rally," a gathering characterized by numbers, enthusiasm and happy results. Chancellor Kent opened with a few prefatory words, and, after a statement by Charles King, later president of Columbia College, the institution was formally recommended "to the liberal patronage of the merchants and their fellow citizens in general." A committee of ten—Thomas H. Smith, Arthur Tappan, James Heard, Jeromus Johnson, Samuel Gilford, Nathaniel Richards, John Stewart, Jr., J. A. Leavitt, John S. Crary and Isaac S. Hone—was appointed to solicit subscriptions. The most gratifying feature of the occasion was thus summed up in the *Statesman*, December 30th: "A large number of names,

<sup>1</sup>From an advertisement in the *American* and in the *Statesman*, Dec. 27, 28, 1824.

as patrons, governors, and annual subscribers, were obtained, the amount of subscriptions exceeding FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS”!

As the several grades of membership just mentioned may prove somewhat puzzling, it is necessary to offer at least a brief explanation of the nomenclature of the Athenæum, as applied to its divisions and privileges.

In the first place there were the Associates,—some of whom were originators of the institution,—all pledged to offer gratuitous services as lecturers. They paid an entrance fee of \$5 and the same sum annually. At their stated quarterly meetings they were to determine the lecturers and subjects, to recommend books and apparatus, and to plan two annual public discourses. Each Associate was entitled to admittance to the lectures, the library and the reading rooms for himself alone, while an additional \$10 a year admitted his family. Lecturers were exempt from yearly dues. Limited in number to 100, at the close of 1824 they included about eighty.

Now these Associates, together with all the other subscribers, were themselves divided into three groups,—Patrons, Governors and Members,—the classification being based on the amount of subscription, as follows:

The Patrons, confined in membership to 100, paid \$200 each, the aggregate of which was to constitute a permanent fund under their exclusive control. A Patron had four votes at elections and was given three transferable tickets to lectures, library, etc., and admission for his family also. His certificate was to be perpetual and like other stock could be sold or devised.

The Governors, similarly limited in number, paid \$100 each, also toward the permanent fund; their certificates to be transferable only during the life of the

original holder. They had two votes, each, and other privileges like the Patrons.

Lastly there were the Members, who paid \$10 a year for single tickets to lectures, library, etc., double that amount securing admission for their families.

In February, 1825, an amended constitution was published in pamphlet form.<sup>1</sup> Its chief innovation is the creation of a board of Directors, to be elected annually by the Society, to consist of eight Patrons, four Governors and four other Members, besides the Treasurer, ex officio. This new body eventually was given control over the "disposable fund," which was made up of annual subscriptions plus the income of the "permanent fund." This latter the Directors could invest, but could not expend without the consent of a majority of Patrons convened.

By this time the membership roll comprised 121 Patrons, 59 Governors and 274 Members, the last being of course those who paid annually. Thus the grand total embraced 454 subscribers—certainly a record little short of extraordinary, especially after an existence of only a few months.

It is under this constitution and management that the earliest extant records of the Society begin. They fill two thirds of a large leather-covered folio, stamped in gilt letters, "NEW-YORK ATHENÆUM. BOARD OF DIRECTORS." The proceedings cover a period of a little over fourteen years, and, though interesting to-day chiefly as a curiosity, have been preserved with scrupu-

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Committee Appointed to Amend the Constitution of the New-York Athenæum.* (12pp. containing also the original address.) New York, D. Fanshaw, 1825. Columbia University Library

has a copy, as also of the last prospectus of the series, entitled *Constitution and By-Laws of the New York Athenæum.* (24 pp.) New York, J. W. Palmer & Co., 1825.



lous care by the Society Library, ever since they were transferred to its keeping so long ago. First in the old volume comes a handsomely penned transcript of the act of incorporation, to be discussed in due season. The minutes proper begin as follows:

A meeting of the Directors of the New York Athenæum was convened, by notice from the Corresponding Secretary [Prof. James Renwick] of the Institution, acting by orders from the President [the Rev. Wm. Harris, D.D.], at Columbia College, on Friday evening 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1825, at seven o'clock. At which time and place appeared the following gentlemen, M<sup>r</sup> Carow, M<sup>r</sup> Cary, M<sup>r</sup> Sheldon, M<sup>r</sup> Sewall, M<sup>r</sup> Richards, M<sup>r</sup> Brevoort, M<sup>r</sup> Leavitt, M<sup>r</sup> Strong, M<sup>r</sup> Johnson, and M<sup>r</sup> Delafield, the Treasurer. The Board was organized by calling M<sup>r</sup> Carow to the chair.

The proceedings, though far more detailed than the early records of the Society Library, are confined chiefly to the matters of business routine pertinent to any board of control. In fact, were it not for such items as appeared in the daily papers from time to time, one might well speculate as to the real nature and full extent of the work conducted by the Directors. For example, the subject of popular lectures, which figured so prominently in the public eye, was managed by the Associates, of whose deliberations no records are known to have survived.\*

Under the constitution, therefore, the Directors attended primarily to the financial administration of their charge, at the same time dealing with other important matters, such as the best possible location for the establishment, and successive negotiations toward uniting with one or another kindred institution. They met regularly, but for more than a year at various offices.

*this guy thinks that if he hasn't found  
a thing the records don't exist  
Records associates. SFB mouse Geary  
my Hist. Society*

Thereafter, the sessions were uniformly held at the headquarters of the Society, styled the "Literary Rooms" or the "Reading Rooms," until 1830, after which date the place of meeting is seldom mentioned, presumably being the apartments of the institution.

These "Literary Rooms," situated over the bookstore of their owners, the Messrs. G. & C. Carvill, at 108 Broadway, on the north corner of Pine street, were occupied by the Athenæum from December, 1824, to May, 1825, at the rate of \$500 a year. On this spot, now covered by but a small portion of the massive Equitable building, the Society continued to make its home—with enlarged accommodations and at a rental varying from \$600 to \$700—until the spring of 1832. Here were kept its wide assortment of periodicals, its medals and specimens, and the beginnings of a library. An interesting sign of prosperity and advancement appears in a vote of February, 1826, "to light the rooms with gas." From November, 1829, to May, 1830, the reading rooms were "lighted with gas every evening until the hour of 8 o'clk P.M."

Nevertheless, the records reveal a steadfast purpose to secure a suitable and permanent abode.<sup>1</sup> Some of these efforts at establishment, in conjunction with other institutions, have already been discussed on pages 297–303.

Again, in October, 1828, there began a series of overtures from the Clinton Hall Association, a new organization, on "the subject of a union of the funds of the Institutions for the purpose of erecting a building

<sup>1</sup> Grant Thorburn, the celebrated Scotch "seedsman," in 1825 bought for \$20,500 the old Friends' Meeting House on Nassau street, which he

says "the New York Athenæum and other public bodies" were hoping to purchase. *Forty Years' Residence in America*. Boston, 1834. P. 87.

jointly.”<sup>1</sup> This project seemed for a time sure of adoption, the Patrons authorizing the expenditure of \$25,000 to buy “the whole or a part of the plot of ground 100 feet square opposite to the brick church, bounded by Beekman Street, Theatre Alley & Nassau Street, and in the erection of a building or two buildings thereon,

*size the Volumes are: We intend also to have the room so contrived, that it may be enlarged in case the Library encreases, and I assure you nothing shall be omitted so that the Society can desire to make it useful and convenient. I beg Your Answer as soon as possible and I am*

*Sir*

*your most obedient and  
most humble servant*

*J. Montgomerie.*

Signature (reduced) of Governor Montgomerie, acknowledging gift of Millington books from S. P. G., 1729. From original in S. P. G. archives, London. See p. 65.

in conjunction with the Clinton Hall Association.” But a full report with estimates called for \$35,000 as the Athenæum’s probable share in the proposed undertak-

<sup>1</sup>The Clinton Hall Association, founded in 1828, “for the cultivation and promotion of Literature, Science, and the Arts,” was “composed of some of the first merchants of the city, united for the laudable purpose of aiding the clerks in their

efforts for intellectual improvement.” [*A Glance At New-York*. 1837.] Incorporated in February, 1830, in November, 1830, it joined forces with the Mercantile Library Association, under the terms of a still-existing agreement.



ing. Thereupon the discussion was dropped, perforce, as the Treasurer's report in May, 1830, showed a permanent fund of just \$27,300, and all idea of borrowing seems to have been wisely foreign to the management.

On another occasion the Patrons of the Athenæum, similarly apprehensive, stifled a unanimous recommendation of the Directors, in November, 1829, to purchase a lot on Broadway, between the City Hall and Franklin street, under an appropriation of \$21,000 for its purchase "and the erection of a suitable building." Once more, in 1830, the Patrons exercised their veto prerogative on a proposal to join in the notable and liberal movement then on foot, toward a union of the several libraries and literary institutions of the city, to form a great university—a movement that was not successful in itself, although from it dates the origin of the present New York University.

Regarding the Athenæum's most conspicuous activity, its lecture courses, a summary will suffice, as follows:

1825–1826: the Rev. Dr. James Mathews, Anniversary Discourse; Prof. Charles Anthon, Roman Literature; Dr. F. G. King, Phrenology; Prof. John McVickar, Taste and Beauty; Richard Ray, The Revival of Classical Literature; Professor James Renwick, Chemistry; John Hone, Jr., Commerce; Prof. Samuel F. B. Morse, Painting, &c; William Beach Lawrence, Political Economy; William Cullen Bryant, Poetry; the Rev. Dr. John F. Schroeder, Oriental Literature. 1826–1827: Professor Renwick, Anniversary Oration; Prof. James Freeman Dana, Electro-Magnetism; Professor Renwick, Astronomy; Dr. F. G. King, Philosophy of Voice; Dr. J. D. Goodman, Natural History; Dr. J. Augustine Smith, The Moral Faculty; William Emerson, German Literature; M. C. Paterson, Some Passages in the History of the Italian Republics. 1827–1828: John Hone, Jr., Introductory Address; Professor McVickar,

Political Economy; Dr. John Revere, Chemistry; Professor Renwick, The Atmosphere and its Phenomena; Prof. S. F. B. Morse, Painting in its Connection with the other Fine Arts; Dr. J. Augustine Smith, The Varieties of the Human Species; William Emerson, English Literature.<sup>1</sup>

These programmes have been compiled from insertions in the columns of the *American*, an ever-faithful champion of the Athenæum. Each speaker gave usually, at weekly intervals or less, a course of three or four lectures, in the chapel of Columbia College, at six o'clock in the evening, or, for a short time in 1826, "punctually at ½ past 6 o'clock."

With the year 1828 the lecturing enterprise of the Athenæum seems wholly to have been abandoned, no further announcements appearing in the current press. Their usefulness had evidently been deemed spent. Such a conclusion it is hard to reconcile with the noble aim of the Associates, and with the wide-spread approval at first.

During its fifteen years of existence, the Athenæum was served by no fewer than fifty-three gentlemen as Directors. There were, in all, five Presidents, the Rev. Dr. William Harris, president of Columbia College, Charles Wilkes, president of the Bank of New York, Chancellor Kent, Peter A. Jay, and Prof. John McVickar, of both the Columbia and General Seminary faculties. The treasurership, so long filled by John Delafield, was later held by Joseph Kernochan, Esq., by Samuel Ward, Jr.,—who should be regarded as a man of letters no less than as a man of fashion, a brother

<sup>1</sup> In accord with the constitution, life membership, including monetary exemption, was conferred upon William Gracie and upon the Rev. Dr. McVickar, Professor Renwick,

Dr. F. G. King, Dr. J. Augustine Smith, Prof. S. F. B. Morse and William Emerson, all "having rendered essential services to the Society."

of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe as well as son-in-law to William B. Astor,—and lastly by Benjamin Woolsey Rogers, a hardware importer on a large scale, a founder of the Bloomingdale Asylum, a Trinity vestryman, and long a governor of the New York Hospital. Devoted service as Secretary was rendered in turn by Professor Renwick, Henry Brevoort, Jr., Frederic De Peyster, Jr., and Stephen C. Williams. Seven of these men—Messrs. Wilkes, Kent, Jay, Renwick, Brevoort, De Peyster and Williams—are to be remembered as Trustees of the Society Library, at one time or another, and, in addition, among the Directors occur the names of seven others, the Rev. Dr. Wainwright, General Laight, Gulian C. Verplanck, Peter A. Schermerhorn, Dr. J. Augustine Smith, Rufus L. Lord and William H. Harison.

Conspicuous in its directorate were, also, the names of such eminent merchants and bankers as Isaac Carow, John W. Leavitt, John Austin Stevens, a founder of the Bank of Commerce and its second president for forty years, Isaac S. Hone, of a distinguished family, and a worker in politics, Henry D. Sewall, the Hon. Jeromus Johnson, Frederick Sheldon, Sr., Benjamin Strong, Henry Kneeland, Ebenezer Irving, wine merchant, a brother of Washington Irving, David Hadden, a Scotchman, the popular brothers, Richard and Robert Ray, leaders of fashion, James Heard, extensively interested in the China trade, Hendrick Booraem, the head of a great silk house, a man of elegant address, Peter Schermerhorn, of ancient lineage, whose son and grandson find honored mention on the roll of Trustees of the Society Library, Joseph Kernochan, Charles A. Davis, an iron merchant, renowned as a wit, John S. Crary and Myndert Van Schaick.



Besides these should be mentioned the Hon. Henry Wheaton, LL.D., Minister to Russia, author and lecturer on subjects in law, the Hon. William Beach Lawrence, later governor of Rhode Island, an authority on international law, John Watts, M.D., and such gentlemen of elegant manners as Col. Nicholas Fish, Henry Cary and John C. Hamilton, son of the great statesman.

The Athenæum was incorporated on April 17, 1826, a copy of its charter covering two pages of the book of minutes. It is a brief, concise instrument, by which the Society was legally constituted a corporation, "for the better cultivation of Literature, Science and the Arts," and given the right to hold real estate not in excess of \$50,000, with all its property forever exempt from state or municipal taxation. It was not until January, 1836, that a seal was adopted, an impression of which in wax embellishes a page of the proceedings for that date.

Several years after the discontinuance of the lecture courses, the constitution was considerably revised, in May, 1832, thereby greatly simplifying the former complex character of the institution. All classification into Patrons, Governors, etc., was swept away, including the original board of Associates. Instead, all property holdings, together with the management of affairs, were vested absolutely in the board of Directors. It only needs to say that the "capital fund" had been divided into shares of \$100 each, to show the complete transformation also in the internal workings of the Society.

The early ambition of the Associates for a library, to "comprise when complete all the standard elementary works of literature and science of every age and nation," failed of realization, it is needless to say. In a report of March, 1829, Treasurer Delafield said: "The

Library, though small, deserves attention; it contains many valuable works of reference." Four years later a printed statement announced "a well selected library of 1,600 vols., together with all the most popular Foreign and American periodicals and newspapers."<sup>1</sup> In 1839, the last year of Athenæum entity, the same notice appeared,<sup>2</sup> few additions having meanwhile been made.

A large proportion of the books at the last consisted of bound volumes of periodicals and newspapers, in both of which lines the Athenæum made a specialty. An advertisement in the *American*, late in March, 1828, gives a full list of the foreign journals, "received at the rooms, by the Packets sailing from England on the first day of every month." In this connection the Hon. John Bigelow, now past ninety years of age, interestedly recalls the eagerness with which he and a friend of his, in 1836 or thereabouts, used to race down to the "Reading Rooms," at the corner of Broadway and Chambers street, for Macaulay's latest article in the *Edinburgh Review*.

At that time the rooms were open on week days from eight o'clock in the morning until nine at night, generous hours surely. The institution, according to the *American*, in March, 1828, subscribed for all local "daily papers, & newspapers from principal cities of the U. States and the Canadas, also all the Periodical works on Science and Literature" of this country. The minutes for May, 1834, enumerate current lists of 32 newspapers and 22 periodicals. Just three years before, the board had decided to dispense with "a few of the foreign periodicals, which—besides the irregularity in their

<sup>1</sup> *New-York As It Is, In 1833*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> *New-York As It Is, In 1839*, p. 68.

receipt—evidently appeared not to be of much interest to the Members, from the circumstance of the pages of several of these remaining in many cases uncut”!

Although the lack of a quorum occurred so often as to excite no comment, on two occasions explicit and solemn reasons are given for failure to meet. On July 7, 1831, “Owing to the decease of the Hon. Jas<sup>s</sup> Munroe, and the public obsequies this afternoon observed, in respect to the memory of one, who had filled the highest office in the Gift of the People of our common country, the Meeting adjourned to this day, did not take place.” Again, from May to November, 1832, the Directors did not assemble once, “in consequence of the prevalence of Cholera, in this City.”

The finances of the Athenæum appear to have been managed conservatively, but for all that the institution languished. In May, 1825, the permanent fund was \$32,300. Necessary expenditures reduced the amount to \$27,300, at which point it remained for eight years, each year's report showing a deficit of over \$300. In January, 1834, the Directors bought of Dr. Hosack his house at 14 Vesey street for \$26,437.50. After renting out the building for a year or two, they sold it, in January, 1836, for \$35,000, at the time when property values were so exaggerated.

In the spring of 1832, the Athenæum left its abode of eight years at Broadway and Pine street for a better location on the second floor of the newly erected Remsen building on the corner of Broadway and Chambers street, at a rental of \$800. Hopes of “a beneficial result,” according to an executive committee report of 1833, were “realized in some degree” only, for “the patronage bestowed upon the Institution continued to



be regulated more by the slight attractions which it offered to the Public, than by a disposition to promote the liberal and benign objects contemplated" by the founders. Reducing the fee from ten to five dollars had already raised the membership of annual subscribers from twenty to seventy-six, and it was expected that the "more central location" would have a good effect. The subscriptions, however, again fell away steadily.

It is now seasonable to review the correspondence between the Athenæum and the Society Library that led to the final absorption of the former by the Library. In following these negotiations, one is indeed led through tortuous "bye-ways and crooked ways." The negotiations in detail read like the record of a military campaign, or, more properly, perhaps, like a series of diplomatic manœuvres. There are all the elements of both: advance and retreat, march and countermarch, attack and repulse, mine and countermine, overtures and withdrawals; terms proposed, rejected, amended, accepted; final agreement. A sizable book might be written on the subject, but space limitations here demand strict condensation.

The first definite proposal of consolidation came in May, 1831, when representatives of the Library Trustees were asked to confer with a committee of Athenæum Directors, "on the subject of an Union of the two Institutions." The joint committee, through Messrs. John J. Morgan, Gulian C. Verplanck and Dr. J. Kearney Rodgers, reported favorably; but a motion to that effect failed to pass the Library board, despite such recommendation, reënforced by communications in the daily papers.<sup>1</sup>

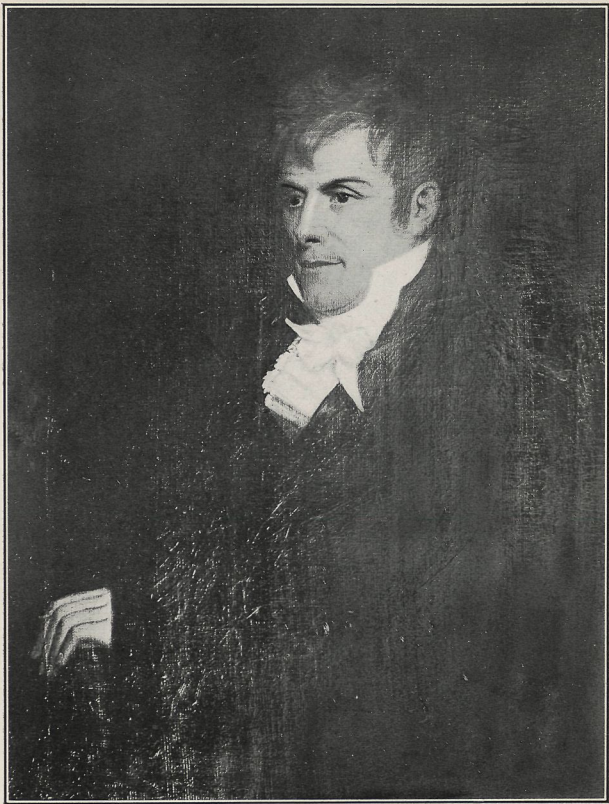
<sup>1</sup> See contributions from "A Friend to Literature" in the *American* for May 11th and 19th, and one from "Mercator" in the same journal for

One month later, however, the discussion was reopened in Library councils by the receipt of a set of twelve resolutions from the Athenæum Directors. In brief they pronounced a union "desirable," at the same time suggesting for its name the compound title, "The New York Athenæum and Library," and stated certain terms for a merger, together with the relative standing of Patrons, Governors and Members—that classification then still existing. In return the Trustees, "after an animated discussion," passed a dozen resolutions similar in character, the chief difference apparently being a substitution of "The City Library and the Athenæum" for the new name. Inasmuch as nothing more was done about the matter in that form, it would seem that the rock of disagreement was the order of precedence in the proposed rechristening!

Several years elapsed before a renewal of the agitation, and then negotiations were started by the Athenæum, simply for the Library and itself to establish themselves "in amicable vicinage." In May, 1835, in response to such request, the Trustees appointed Professor Anderson, Dr. Rodgers and Treasurer Morgan to meet Messrs. James Heard, John A. Stevens and William B. Lawrence of the Athenæum. This joint committee drew up a "short and simple exposition" of the situation, which, as read and accepted, covers more than nine full pages in the Athenæum book of minutes. It begins with a convincing preamble on the proper maintenance of "an American Institution for Literary Purposes," which should look for support, "not to the patronizing few, but to the reading many."

May 13th, this last advocating more regard to the wishes of the mer-

chants, "the main dependence of such an institution."



Hon. John Jordan Morgan  
Trustee, 1816-1838. Treasurer, 1826-1838





In its advocacy of "the contemplated site"—two lots on the east side of Broadway, bounded by Leonard street and Catherine lane—the joint report considers benefits, sure to result, under these "conditions":

1. *Economy.* "No conceivable combination of circumstances can ever take from property on Broadway its power of commanding a remunerating revenue." To say nothing of the ampler and far better accommodations thus made possible, the Library could count on increasing the rents then accruing from unoccupied rooms from a paltry \$600 to "three times this amount." Further, "no where else on that magnificent avenue" could two such choice lots be procured, bounded by streets on both sides as well as in front.

2. *Accessibility.* In a similarly prophetic vein the report says in part: "From the configuration of the surface, Broadway will always continue to be the main artery, as it were, of our circulating population, and nineteen twentieths of those who will wish to avail themselves of the privileges of an Athenæum or a Library will pass, for other purposes, in the general stream of our population, by the very doors of our Institutions."

3. *Increased public prominence.* Such a "central position" would be "admirably calculated to bring the two bodies conspicuously and prominently before the public eye, to exhibit their accommodations and to extend their facilities to the countless crowd of strangers and visitors who annually throng our principal Hotels; and to make known to many even of our own citizens who have been left ignorant of the fact, that there [are] Institutions in this City competent under favorable circumstances to administer to all the wants of the reading public, and to furnish to an extent, at least equal to the

effectual demand, a supply of the great staples of literary intelligence."

4. *Proximity of kindred institutions.* Just as "kindred occupations" gain by "mere contiguity," so "the concentration on contiguous grounds of various institutions devoted to literary and scientific objects would not only confer upon the whole a character of unity, propriety, dignity, and completeness, but would greatly enlarge the sphere of usefulness of each." The urgent need of the time was to bring together "the scattered and wasted intellectual resources of this great City." While lamenting "the absence of everything like literary sympathy or learned fellowship," the committee, in striking contrast to the desire for union so pronounced but a few years before, was "far from entertaining the plausible but chimerical idea that any real advantage would flow from the consolidation under one charter and one government of the various bodies which constitute, in the true sense of the word, the University of the City."

All thought of actual union between the two would seem definitely discouraged in this corollary: "Nor is it perhaps desirable that out of all the numerous sovereignties into which our literary republic is divided, any two should so lose their distinctive character as to become absolutely merged into one." In this view—or more in its expression, perhaps—the reader may detect a slight tinge of the familiar State Rights doctrine, then but lately reiterated.

In conclusion, the report recommends an attitude of mutual courtesy and "the erection of buildings uniform in out-ward appearance, but in no way interfering with the right of separate property management & controul,"



and predicts that "no intelligence would be hailed with more hearty congratulations by the public than the announcement of the purchase of [the] property in question."

The distinct literary finish of this report, no less than its thoroughness and discernment, must have deeply impressed the gentlemen to whom it was addressed. We can only speculate on its exact authorship.<sup>1</sup> The chief point that concerns our study, however, is that the "deal," in modern parlance, "went through" with gratifying despatch in less than a month.

It was on June 3, 1835, that the committees, consisting of Messrs. Heard and Stevens for the Athenæum and Dr. Rodgers, Dr. Anderson and Mr. Morgan for the Library, signed a contract with Mr. Ebenezer Clark for the land already described, the price being \$47,500. Under its terms \$1000 was paid at the signing, the balance to be adjusted upon taking possession the first of May ensuing.

For its committee on terms of settlement the Library Trustees chose Messrs. Bancker, Verplanck and Laight, while the Athenæum was represented by Messrs. Heard and Stevens and Dr. J. Augustine Smith. The agreement drawn up by this joint committee and accepted by both boards is entered in full in the Library records for January 30, 1836, and in those of the Athenæum for February 4th. It was in effect as follows:

The ground was to be divided into two lots having an equal frontage on Broadway, with a division line parallel to Leonard street. After a valuation by three disinter-

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to a university is so thoroughly in accord with the views of the Hon. Albert Gallatin, that it is possible the paper was prepared

by his *fidus Achates*, John Austin Stevens the elder, a Director of the Athenæum throughout its career.

ested persons, possession was to be determined by lot, each owner to pay the appraised value of its drawing. It being deemed inadvisable to erect a building at once, the premises were to be let, the accruing rentals to be apportioned "first to the payment to the owner of the lot on Leonard Street, of the interest at six per cent. on the sum paid for the same, above what was paid for the lot on Catherine Lane; then for taxes, and the balance to be equally divided between the societies."

A building was to be started on or before May 1, 1837, at joint expense, not to exceed \$60,000 in cost. It should have a hallway sixteen feet wide to allow for a partition, should the wish for separation ever arise. The second story, in two equal divisions, was to be devoted to the objects of the respective societies. It was planned to have a joint committee rent out the rest of the edifice, the income to be distributed as above described. The third floor was to be finished in a style suitable for the Academy of Fine Arts or for the National Academy of Design, to either of which institutions it might be let for a term not exceeding ten years. Should such leasing prove impracticable, the committee was to finish and let the same at its discretion.

This document was signed for the Library by Evert A. Bancker, acting Treasurer, and in behalf of the Athenæum by its President, James Kent, and then sealed by the respective Secretaries, Evert A. Bancker and Stephen C. Williams. February 15, 1836, was the date of this covenant, just two days after the Library Trustees had sold the old building on Nassau street.<sup>1</sup>

In the Athenæum records alone is given the finding of the appraisers, Messrs. I. Green Pearson, Benjamin

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 381-382.

L. Swan and Rufus L. Lord, on April 25, 1836. It contains a map of the property executed in red ink, the dimensions of both lots given as  $30 \times 100$  feet, with a narrow triangular slip along the lane, only six feet wide at the rear. The Leonard Street lot was valued at \$26,250 and that on Catherine lane at \$21,250, exclusive of the gore, which belonged of course with the latter, and which the joint committee decided was worth \$500. The final terms, therefore, pronounced the former lot as worth \$26,000 and the other, \$21,500. That on Leonard street was drawn by the Athenæum, the other becoming the property of the Library.<sup>1</sup>

It is thus perfectly plain that this first agreement contained no clause about consolidation, simply stipulating that the two institutions should coöperate in the erection of structures, side by side and uniform in design. When the time agreed upon arrived, however, the Athenæum was financially unable to carry out its part of the covenant, and the Library, "owing to the high price of Labor and Materials," reluctant to undertake the work alone. But in June, 1837, the Library Trustees voted to begin building at once upon their lot, appointing Messrs. Verplanck, Johnson and Evertson to confer with representatives of the Athenæum, "or any other society" desirous of joining them. This last means the National Academy of Design, for, in a report just rendered, that society was stated to be in need of "a proper exhibition room," with \$6000 in available funds toward "defraying in part the cost of the build-

<sup>1</sup> At this time the premises were occupied by two small frame buildings, erected prior to 1809. In the one on the Leonard Street corner a hardware business had been conducted by Stephen Conover since

1810, while the other was kept as a grocery store by one Cahoone. Until forced to vacate, these persons paid to the two institutions a joint rent of \$1800 a year.



ing." If the Athenæum would only fulfil its share of the compact, such an arrangement would be wholly satisfactory to all concerned, for there would then be assured "ample room to the Academy of Design."

In reply the Athenæum Directors "professed their willingness" to abide by the agreement, if they could raise the needed sum. Finding that impossible, they proposed "a real or substantial union." A conspicuous gain would be the joint possession of "a large, spacious & square room, imposing in its architectural proportions and convenient for the arrangement of the Books and the retirement of Students and arrangements of lights." Otherwise, there would be "two long and narrow Library Rooms," devoid of artistic grace or "any features of peculiar convenience."

A fair-sized book might be written of the negotiations—at times interspersed with virtual passages at arms—that distracted the two boards for the ensuing ten months. A set of resolutions issuing from the one camp would inevitably meet with disfavor from the other, and in turn the latter's proposals were as promptly rejected. The situation was far more analogous to that of adversaries sulkily endeavoring to come to terms than of two associations aiming to promote the arts of peace. Furthermore, within the lines there was also a fierce spirit of division, especially among the Trustees of the Library, with regard to terms of alliance.

Despite the "belief" of a joint committee that "the Jealousies heretofore preventing Union" would "give way to more liberal considerations," and that their common objects would be "better promoted by united than single handed efforts," the Trustees were obliged, after repeated, futile attempts at unanimous action, to leave

the decision of the whole matter with the Library shareholders at their annual meeting. Time after time the entire board would assemble to pass upon resolutions, only to have a tie vote result. Never were Trustees more devoted, or more steadfast in adhering to conviction, than the twelve men then in office. Unfailing was the line of cleavage on motion after motion, the members favoring the terms finally adopted being Messrs. Laight, Verplanck, Harison, Inglis, Lawrence and Johnson, at least three of them members of the Athenæum and the first two, Directors. As stoutly opposed to the "gross inequality" of the proposed terms, were Messrs. Morgan, Hamersley, Ferris, Evertson, Nicoll and Townsend. Their contention was that the Library, in addition to its collections, "admitted to be of great value," held property in excess of \$40,000, "in cash or its equivalent immediately available," with an additional income of over \$1600 a year from the annual payment charge of \$4 on each share. In contradistinction to this, the stockholders of the Athenæum had a cash capital of only \$33,250, and "no library worth mentioning."

Nevertheless, they were willing, under the lead of Mr. Evertson, to sell 318 shares—corresponding to the number in the Athenæum<sup>1</sup>—at \$40 each by May 1st, "provided the Athenæum would dissolve and give up their charter, and as many of their Stockholders as see fit individually become members of the Library." Owing to the absence of Mr. Verplanck, this motion was carried; but it was not acceptable to the Directors of the Athenæum, who declared they could not of themselves dissolve their association. Even if they could, or should wish to, there was not time before May 1st to take the

<sup>1</sup> It appears, however, that the exact number was 316 shares.

Ordered, That Col. Willet, Capt. Rutgers, Mr. Garriſſen and Major Philipſe, be a Committee, to conſider of proper Remedies, to put a Stop to that growing Miſchief at preſent, and for preventing the like for the future, and that they report the ſame to the Houſe, as ſoon as may be.

Then the Houſe adjourned till 3 of the Clock in the Afternoon.

Die Martis, 3<sup>ho</sup>. P. M. June 24, 1729.

MR. Garriſſen reported from the Committee, appointed to conſider of proper Remedies, to put a Stop to the growing Miſchief ariſing by the great Number of Perſons, which lately have ſet up to practice the Law; That they are of Opinion, that a Bill ought to be brought in for that Purpoſe.

Ordered, That the ſame Committee, do prepare and bring in ſuch a Bill accordingly.

The Houſe (according to Order) taking into Conſideration, the Reaſons of the Council, for their Amendments to the Bill, entitled, *An Act, for the more eaſy Acknowledgment of Deeds*;

Ordered, That the Committee of this Houſe, which were at the laſt Conference, do draw up Reaſons, why this Houſe cannot agree to the ſaid Amendments, notwithstanding the ſaid Reaſons.

The Speaker (at the Requeſt of his Excellency) communicated to this Houſe, a Letter from Mr. David Humpbreds, Secretary to the Society for the Propagation of the Goſpel in foreign Parts, dated in London, the 23d of September laſt, directed to his ſaid Excellency, importing, that whereas a large and valuable Library of Books, conſiſting of about a thouſand Volumes, had been bequeathed to them, by the late Dr. Millington, Rector of New-ington; and that the Society being deſirous to place the ſame, where it might be moſt uſeful abroad, had agreed to fix it in the City of New-York. But it being their Intention it ſhould be eſtabliſhed a Library, from which the Clergy and Gentlemen of this Government, and Jerſey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut, might borrow Books to read, upon giving Security to return them within a limited Time; it was their Deſire that a proper Method ſhould be taken for the Preſervation of the Books, before they ſend them over; and therefore, deſired it might be recommended to the Aſſembly, that a proper Place may be provided, wherein this Library may be repoſited for the publick Uſe, and that an Act be made, providing for the due Preſervation of theſe Books, and all others, which ſhall be added to them.

Which Letter being read, the Houſe do in the moſt grateful Manner, acknowledge the favourable Intention of the Society towards this Place, in preferring it before any of his Maſteſty's other Plantations on this Continent, to repoſite a Library in, which will not only redound to the Reputation of this Colony, but be vaſtly uſeful and beneficial to the Inhabi-

tants thereof. But before the Houſe proceed to take any Reſolutions thereon; it is,

Ordered, That the Clerk deliver a Copy of this Minute to the Mayor of the City of New-York, who is deſired to convene the Common Council upon the Subject Matter thereof, and that they make return to this Houſe, whether that Corporation already have a proper and convenient Place for ſuch a Library, and are willing to make it ſuitable for that Uſe.

Mr. Pawling and Mr. Livingſton, in Behalf of their Wives, Catharina and Cornelia, Daughters to Col. Henry Beckman, deceased; praying they may have Leave to bring in a Bill at the Beginning of the next Sitting, after the Concluſion of this preſent ſeſſion, for enabling them to ſell and diſpoſe of a certain Part of the Lands, deviled to them, by their ſaid Father.

Ordered, That Leave be given to bring in a Bill accordingly.

Major Plat preſented to this Houſe, a Bill, entitled, *An Act, for confirming the Allowance to the Representatives of the Counties of Suffolk, and Queen's County; and for preventing Miſtakes in the Superſurſors of the ſaid Counties, and to increaſe the Number of Superſurſors in the County of Suffolk*; was read the firſt Time, and ordered to be read a ſecond Time.

Reſolved, That this Houſe will, To-morrow, reſolve into a Committee of the whole Houſe, to conſider further of his Excellency's Speech.

In Conſideration that the Harveſt is drawing near,

Reſolved, That this Houſe will not receive or admit of any new Matters, but proceed in the Diſpatch of the Buſineſs now before this Houſe.

Then the Houſe adjourned till 9 of the Clock To-morrow Morning.

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Die Mercurij, 9<sup>ho</sup>. A. M. June 25, 1729.

MR. Samuel Hearb, Deputy Weigh Maſter (according to Order) laid before this Houſe, an Account of Cocoa for weighing, from the firſt of July 1728, to the 24th Inſtant June; amounting to Eleven Pounds, Fifteen Shillings and Four-pence Halfpenny.

Ordered, That the ſaid Account lie on the Table for the Conſideration of the Members.

The Bill, entitled, *An Act, for the confirming the Allowance to the Representatives of the Counties of Suffolk, and Queen's County; and for preventing Miſtakes in the Superſurſors of the ſaid Counties, and to increaſe the Number of Superſurſors in the County of Suffolk*; was read the ſecond Time, and committed to the Members of the Iſland Naſſau and Richmond County.

Mr. Livingſton reported from the Committee, appointed to conſider the Reaſons of the Council, for their Amendments to the Bill, entitled, *An Act, for the more eaſy Acknowledgment of Deeds*; That they are of Opinion, this Houſe cannot agree to the ſaid Amendments.

Firſt, For that both the Title and Scope of the Bill, is only for making the Acknowledgment of Deeds eaſy to the Subjects; And,

Secondly, For that moſt of the other Amendments are more proper for a Regiſter Act, which they conceived foreign to the Intention of the Bill; which being read, were approved of by the Houſe.

Ordered, That Mr. Livingſton deliver a Copy of theſe Reaſons to the Committee of the Council.

Then the Houſe adjourned to 3 o'Clock, in the Afternoon.

Die Mercurij, 3<sup>ho</sup>. P. M. June 25, 1729.

COL. Myndert Schuyler reported from the Committee, to whom was referred, the Bill, entitled, *An Act, for the better clearing, regulating and further laying-out, publick High Roads, in the City and County of Albany*. That they had gone through the Bill, and made ſeveral Amendments thereto; which they had directed him to report to the Houſe; which were read, and agreed unto by the Houſe.

Ordered, That the Bill with the Amendments be engroſſed. Major Philipſe preſented to this Houſe, a Bill, entitled, *An Act, for regulating Practitioners and preventing Abuſes in the Practice of the Law*, which was read the firſt Time, and ordered to be read a ſecond Time.

Reſolved,

7 O



required legal steps. But, inasmuch as their object was "to transfer every farthing of [corporate] property" to the Library, when this act should be accomplished the Athenæum would practically be dissolved, while "its legal dissolution" could be effected at any time.

There the question lay at issue until after the fast-approaching annual meeting of the Library shareholders. It is not to be supposed that such a heated and persistent dispute could long be confined within the privacy of Trustee meetings. Nor, especially in view of the character of this controversy, affecting so vitally the very being of the Library, can it be thought that the board would desire to keep the matter to itself. It would be only natural for each side to wish to share responsibility for its acts and to gain a majority of adherents from the members at large.

Accordingly it will occasion no surprise to learn that the current press for a fortnight was made the medium for a continuous bombardment between the two factions. The projectiles varied in force and weight from the customary announcement of the coming election, and an equally matter-of-fact statement of the result, to communications charged with an extreme of bitterness and rancor. Some were calculated to persuade through simple presentation of facts, while others carried the sting of satire or sarcasm, a poison often reacting on its user. In a few instances the shots came openly from one or the other of the two camps, but in most cases the marksmen were screened behind editorial license or fictitious signatures. To such an extent was the warfare carried that one contributor, "Knickerbocker," exclaims in despair: "Well may this unfortunate institution—the City Library—say, 'save me from my friends!'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the *American*, April 18, 1838.

The same writer thus continues:

Two parties, each professing to have the good of the institution near their hearts, are desirous of ruling its destinies. One says, "Let us alone. We are doing very well. We rule supreme. We have so long had our own way, that any alteration to suit what you call the spirit of the age will throw us into new situations, and impose upon us new responsibilities and new duties, for which we feel our unfitness. What is the honor of New York to us? 'Will honor set a limb?' Will honor permit us to pre-occupy the apartments of the Library with our chosen *clique*? We have a comfortable home. Why bring us and our deeds to the light? We are doing very well, we are rich." This is the *Sedentary* party, which sits like an incubus on this respectable institution.

The other party, which we may denominate the *Movement*, says: "We thank you for your paternal care, for your brooding over the interests of our friend. But do not neglect the best opportunity that was ever offered to establish permanently the prosperity of the Library. The Athenæum is ready and desirous to unite with you upon terms so liberal, as in themselves to excite your suspicions, terms more liberal than those you were willing to accept some years ago. You suspect their motives. You fear the loss of absolute power. Do not such names as Verplanck, Laight, Harison, with a host of others, your shareholders, silence such unworthy suspicions? Do you suppose they desire to appropriate Public Property to private uses? Perish the thought. They, in common with a majority of the Society, feel that the Library belongs to the Public, that it is treason to calculate the value of the 'union' with a view to division. No, let our motto be 'Union and Force' not 'Divide and Conquer.'" So says the *Movement* Party.

The question is not, Shall the Library give up its charter? No! the Athenæum resigns its own. It is not, Shall Athenæum influences preponderate? No! they, as individuals, only wish to buy at a price named by the *seller*, a minority of the shares. They give you what you want—money. They only *ask* in return that share in your privileges which by law they are entitled

to *demand*, the use of your books and a share in the credit which must result from the establishment of an Institution which shall rank equal, if not superior, to any in our country.

This communication has been quoted nearly in full, for it is a clear, as well as a temperate, expression of the pro-Athenæum cause. From the score and more articles that fairly deluged the various newspaper offices only one other will be selected, though most of them afford spicy reading. The extract to follow, signed "Corlaer," appeared in the *American* for April 21st, and is here reproduced in its entirety, not merely as uttering the opposite view, in direct reply to the foregoing, but also for its summary of the Athenæum's career, as well as for its delightfully facetious touch. Under this title, "LIBRARY AND ATHENEUM," it is addressed to the editor, as follows:

Your correspondent who figures under the successive signatures of Knickerbocker and Diedrick Knickerbocker, has evidently forgotten his own name. He is no other than *Rip Van Winkle* himself, and not sufficiently aroused from his nap to be conscious of his true appellation. He denominates the members of the Atheneum a *mouvement* party, and applies the name of *sedentaries* to the party of the Library.

Awake Rip, to the facts! Scratch your head and rub your eyes, until your somnolency has departed, and then "listen and perpend." It is true that just before Rip's nap commenced, the Atheneum made a grand *mouvement* in this community, and the recollections that preceded his slumbers account for his present impressions. At that period nothing was talked of but the Atheneum, which, with its hundred literary and learned Associates, its hundred Patrons, its hundred Governors, its Subscribers, its President, its eight Vice Presidents, its Corresponding Secretary, its two Recording Secretaries, its Treasurer, its Curator, and its sixteen Directors, gave out that it



was to be no ornamental institution, but intended to elevate the literary character of the city, and diffuse universally among our benighted citizens a taste for science and the arts. It had its lectures on taste and beauty, on the revival of classical literature, on oriental literature, on Roman literature, on eloquence, on political economy, on *commerce*, on painting, poetry, and chemistry, on phrenology, geology, and all the other *ologies*; and promised that it would duly proceed in instructing in astronomical, astrological, and, in short, as Mrs. Malaprop would express it, all other "*diabolical studies*." The throngs which attended the lectures, it was imagined, would eventually be so great, that no room already constructed in the city was large enough to accommodate the auditors. Such was the excitement in regard to the institution, that even its name became a *quaestio vexata* of orthography. Some warmly insisted that the penultima ought to be the diphthong *æ*, while others as ardently contended that the simple vowel *e* was entitled to that distinction. The learned Associates differed on this matter. The wealthy Patrons *could* not solve the difficulty, and the sturdy Governors *would* not. The Legislative power of the State was alone found equal to the dissolution of this Gordian knot. An act of incorporation was granted in 1826, which enabled the institution to hold fifty thousand dollars' worth of real estate, which would afford a sufficiently capacious chapel for the lectures; and it forever put at rest the pretensions of the ambitious diphthong—enacting that the society should thereafter be known by the style of "The New York Athenæum."

It was in this posture of things that Rip's drowsiness commenced. He will be surprised to hear, that since the period in question, and while he has been indulging in his slumbers, there has been no *mouvement* in the Athenæum, except "from post to pillar." The excision of the diphthong had a kindred effect with the clipping of Sampson's hair. From that moment the Associates, the Patrons, the Governors, the Presidents, the Curators, &c., &c., seemed to be shorn of their strength "for the better cultivation of literature, science and the arts." It is needless to detain poor Rip with a detail of all its intermediate *mouvements*; but if he will take the trouble of enquiring, he will find

that this literary, scientific, and philosophic creation has shared the fate of most of the other literary, scientific, and philosophic inflations which preceded it, and that its last *mouvement* has been to an upper story in Broadway, where it spends the lingering remnant of its existence in the reduced character of an indifferent reading room.

So much for the *mouvement* party. Let us now look, honest Rip! to the *Seductaries*. They have an unpretending establishment, which began with the trifling capital of six hundred pounds *old York currency*. It has no high sounding titles connected with it. Its affairs are committed to twelve *Trustees*. It has not even a *President*—the Board electing its temporary chairman at each meeting. By strict attention to their duties, by the practice of a *Dutch* economy, which never permits the outgoings to exceed the income, by discarding all the magnificent fancies which have proved the bane of every other literary association in this city, the successive trustees have collected a library of 25,000 volumes, worth \$40,000, and other property of the value of \$41,000 more. The *setting* of the *Seductaries*, therefore, has not been without profit; they have kept to their nest and hatched their eggs, while those of the *mouvement* cacklers have all proved addle.

Shall we then, honest Rip! transfer the control of the Library to those whose career in another institution has been so unprofitable, or continue it with those who are disposed to pursue the old, prudent, thrifty, and wholesome system? If you have recovered the use of your seven senses, and have no fashionable contempt of your *Nieuw Amsterdam* blood, I can safely leave the question to your own decision.

In the meantime, on April 18th, the dissatisfied element, at the Howard House on Broadway, presented a ticket of nominees, pledged, if elected, to reject “the terms hitherto offered by the New-York Atheneum for a junction of the two corporations.” It comprised—besides the six stalwarts of the retiring board, whose “judicious and firm conduct” was cordially approved—Mr.

Verplanck of the contrary-minded, the Rev. Dr. Berrian, but lately a Trustee, and other men of standing, including ex-Mayor William Paulding, John L. Lawrence, John T. Dolan and Anthony Lamb. The dissenters published an address, "TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY,"<sup>1</sup> the authorship of which was attributed to John J. Morgan. The paper contains, briefly, a rehearsal of the previous covenant with the Athenæum, as of the latter's more recent proposals, and expresses astonishment, not merely that the Directors "should have supposed that the Trustees of the Library would have acceded to the proposition," but "that six of the Trustees of the Library did accede" to it. The following declaration is significant of their belief: "The truth of the matter is, it is not a case of individuals wanting shares, it is a society wanting to make a good speculation in the shares of another society, and by votes thus obtained, to make that society a mere appendage to their own." Far from being opposed to a union with the Athenæum, the undersigned Trustees, in protesting against the terms offered, heartily desired "all conflicting interests to cease by merging the two societies into one, and, by the perfect union of their property and influence, to obtain more fully the objects for which they were both created."

On April 17th, at the Broadway House, there had assembled a company of shareholders favoring the Athenæum proposals. They also drew up resolutions and an address, signed by the six Trustees of their persuasion, and nominated, besides those gentlemen, Evert A. Bancker, a former Trustee, Charles A. Clinton, Daniel

<sup>1</sup> A single copy is in the Library of the Historical Society. It is a two-page leaflet, suitable for mailing.



Seymour, William Kent, Nathaniel F. Moore and A. Robertson Rodgers, all well-known citizens. The address, styled a "STATEMENT OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY," directed to the shareholders, fills a pamphlet of sixteen pages,<sup>1</sup> besides an appendix containing certain resolutions by the Athenæum Directors and the Council of the Academy of Design, and tables to show the comparative holdings of the Library and the Athenæum. It reviews the successive proceedings of the past few months and explains how it would be for the great advantage of the Library to accept the latter's proposals. The undersigned five Trustees, Mr. Verplanck being then at Albany, declared their object had been "to protect not to betray, to build up not to destroy, to extend not to abridge the usefulness" of the Library, the "genial doctrine" of whose motto—"Emollit mores"—deprecated an "exclusive and narrow spirit so unfavorable to literature."

Unlike political contests of to-day, in which both sides agree to a truce on the day before the actual measuring of strength, these contestants allowed each other, and the long-suffering public as well, absolutely no respite. Up to the very morning of the final conflict were continued the distracting preparations of the two parties, whose "civil broils," the *American* said on April 21st, were "disturbing the quiet of that venerable institution, the City Library." For more than ten days those who depended upon newspapers for mental nourishment must have been surfeited with the amount of Library-Athenæum pabulum served to them.

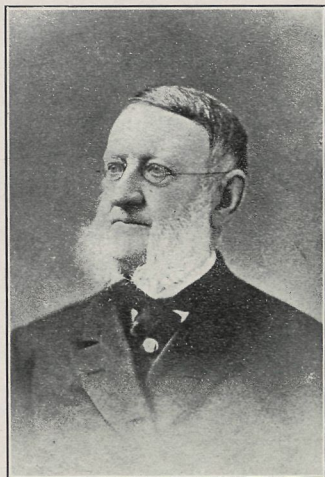
<sup>1</sup> The Historical Society having in its possession two copies of this pamphlet, Librarian Robert H.

Kelby kindly presented one to the Society Library in April, 1905.

Almost on the eve of the election, however, occurred an event which lends rather a dramatic as well as a melancholy interest to the situation. This was the sudden death of Edgar Evertson, a man only thirty-seven years of age and one of the most active members of the board during the year past. His devotion to the Library was recognized in the wording of the newspaper notices, inviting to his funeral "the friends of the family and the Trustees of the New York Society Library." The board took appropriate action on the decease of their "late friend and associate," and voted to attend the services, which were announced, strangely enough, for April 24th at four o'clock, the very hour of closing the polls.

The fateful Library election, held at last, resulted in a complete victory for the Athenæum party. Not a single candidate on the opposition ticket was elected except Mr. Verplanck, but, as his name adorned both lists, his return would seem in either event to have been foreordained. In justice to him it should be said that, when he found, upon his return from an extended session of the legislature, that the dissenters had also nominated him, he made haste to publish in the papers his disavowal of the act and his concurrence in the views of General Laight and "the gentlemen associated with him." But this statement came too late to alter the printed ticket.

Apparently not content with the usual bare announcement of the outcome, in this instance the winning side went further. The public must be informed to its full satisfaction just how the votes were cast, ostensibly—or, let us assume for sweet charity's sake, chiefly—that there might be no future misunderstanding, as in the illegal election of 1825. Consequently there was in-



Alexander Robertson Rodgers  
Trustee, 1838-1855. Treasurer, 1842-1855





served in the *Evening Post* of April 25th, not merely the list of successful candidates, but also the showing made by the defeated nominees. A little "figuring on the returns" of this extraordinary contest will be of interest. By as nearly exact a computation as it is possible to make, it is clear that fully 325, and very probably as many as 350, shares were represented at the polls. As the voting hours lasted only from noon to four o'clock, and as no proxies were allowed, there must certainly have been a congestion at some part of the time in the neighborhood of 12 Chambers street, then the temporary home of the Society Library, for the ballots were deposited at the rate of oftener than one a minute.

Of split tickets there is manifold evidence, for in only three cases did as many as two candidates receive the same number of votes. Mr. Verplanck was credited with the most votes—241; while Charles A. Clinton, who received the lowest number among the elect—164, had only seven votes more than the two standing highest of the opposition—John J. Morgan and John L. Lawrence. However disappointed or apprehensive the vanquished party may have felt, its adherents abided by the result philosophically, perhaps relieved after all that the whole responsibility had now devolved upon a united board.

Properly interpreting this triumph as an endorsement of their policy, the newly chosen Trustees at once set about fulfilling their preëlection pledges. Accordingly, after some preliminary parleying, the two boards agreed: first, that 316 shares of Library stock be issued "to such person or persons being members of the Athenæum as the New York Athenæum may designate, upon

receiving a deed for the lot of the Athenæum, . . . subject to the mortgage of \$16,000 now thereon"; and, second, that the Library take charge of the books and other effects of the Athenæum, "now in the rooms of the Library, to be used without charge by the members of both Institutions until the expiration of one year from this date, and until further agreement between the two parties."

This covenant proved final and binding. In conformity therewith, President McVickar of the Athenæum signed and delivered the deed on May 16, 1838, and in return received on July 6th a certificate of membership made out to Benjamin W. Rogers, as trustee for 316 shares in the Library, signed by Secretary Inglis and Treasurer Harison. In September the persons designated by Mr. Rogers were "permitted to take Books from the Library on the footing of Members."

It was not, however, until April 26, 1839, that the Trustees—having at last received on transfer the bond and mortgage of \$22,436, held on the former Athenæum property at 14 Vesey street (in addition to the deed of its lot on Broadway), and having agreed "to appropriate the interest of the capital yearly forever to the payment of the annual dues of \$4 on each of the 316 shares now held by B. W. Rogers"—formally ratified, through Treasurer Harison and Secretary Inglis, a signed and sealed release, "endorsed upon the certificate for the shares."

The release, spread in full upon the minutes, in effect acknowledges receipt of the above sum from Mr. Rogers, and thereupon absolves him, "his executors, administrators, successors & assigns, forever of & from the payment, in respect to the within mentioned rights [*i.e.*



shares], and each and every of them, of any sum or sums of money which the said the Trustees of the New York Society Library are *now* authorized and allowed by law to levy & require annually from the members of the Library."

This document and procedure demand the further explanation that on March 15th the legislature had, on due petition of the board, passed "An Act to Authorize the Trustees of the New York Society Library to Commute their Annual Dues." In brief it empowered the Trustees "to commute or receive a sum in gross for or upon any rights or shares now held or hereafter to be held in the said Society, in lieu of the payment of the annual dues thereon," at the same time specifying that the said sum should not be less than \$67. By this enactment the Library was really the gainer, for, at the rate of seven per cent. then prevailing, the interest on this amount, \$4.69, was manifestly greater than the annual payment of \$4 then charged.

Thus owners of any of the 316 Athenæum shares, after due transfer of membership, were—like regular Library members who should pay outright the sum of \$67, in lieu of the payment of \$4 a year on a share—to be forever exempt from paying the annual dues the institution was *then* authorized to collect. But there is no stipulation, either in the release or in the amendment to the charter of the Library, that can be construed to prohibit the Trustees from raising the yearly payments, under legislative approval. It was plainly, therefore, no breach of faith on the part of the board to raise the annual dues to six dollars in March, 1842, and again to ten dollars in April, 1866,—both of these amendments having the sanction of the members at large, as of the

legislature. Consequently there can be no denying their legal right to levy upon shares commuted on the four-dollar-a-year basis the amount in excess of the sum *then* yearly collected.

Reverting now to the prolonged game of consolidation, it appears that all these transactions were approved at the last-recorded meeting of the Athenæum Directors, April 29, 1839. Treasurer Rogers as trustee was authorized "to transfer the rights held by the Athenæum in the N. Y. Socy Library to the shareholders in this Corporation and to receive in exchange a transfer of their several shares in the Athenæum." This order would imply the virtual dissolution of that Society by the voluntary surrender of their shares by its members. So it would have been, had *all* made the exchange; but they did not. The last entry in the Directors' minutes is an appointment of inspectors for the annual election, notice of which had already been inserted in the daily papers, to be held on May 1st "at No. 12 Chambers street." Here the "books, maps, charts and medals" of the Athenæum had been stored since May 1, 1838, upon closing the rooms at the corner of Broadway and Chambers street.

There is no evidence, however, that a meeting was held or new Directors chosen; but, conformably to their charter,—if not out of a very human obstinacy,—in 1840 and again in 1841 an annual meeting with election of Directors was advertised to take place "at the office of the Eagle Fire Insurance Co., 59 Wall street," of which concern General Laight was president. According to the city directory for 1837–1838, the Athenæum was at "74 Chambers c. Broadway," the next year at "12 Chambers," and in 1840 at "348 Broadway"—its

final mention as an entity. That the terms of its absorption by the Library were not generally understood, however, is manifest in a brief editor's note in the *American* for April 30, 1840, which gives the impression that the Athenæum was in control of the situation (!) in chronicling that "the New York Society Library and the Athenæum are moving their books and papers to the new building corner of Leonard street and Broadway, . . . and the Athenæum has at last carried out the intents of its founders. It embraces a reading-room and a lecture-room, which will, no doubt, be as well filled as in the first lectures of the Associates at the Chapel of Columbia College."

Though the Athenæum thus really ceased to exist, it does not appear that action was ever taken to annul its charter. So from time to time the question arose at Trustee meetings, "as to the present relation of the Library with the Athenæum," without, however, securing a settlement until June, 1883. Then Charles E. Strong upon investigation reported nineteen Athenæum shares still in existence, whose thirteen owners represented "its charter and corporate rights" and were entitled "to call upon B. W. Rogers or his representatives in the trust for a share in the Library for every Athenæum share" they should "surrender." The Library had "no power or duty in the matter, having fully carried out its agreement with the Athenæum."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Only one attempt seems ever to have been made to revive the old charter of the Athenæum, and that came from an outside and wholly unexpected quarter. In January, 1859, there was received a communication from the Athenæum Club, a recently organized association, "as to the practicability of a coalition

between itself and the Society Library. Among "reasons for a union" were suggested the "excellent charter still valid," of the same name; the "inadequate improvement" of the Library building "and its contents" by the public generally; "the remarkable adaptation of the site and edifice to the joint purposes of a



Thus came to an end the history of the New York Athenæum. Founded by wealthy and cultivated citizens to further objects praiseworthy and benevolent in scope, it languished and expired, chiefly through the lamentable want of moral as well as financial support, so long characteristic of the metropolis toward letters and the arts. Other conditions there no doubt were, contributing to its failure, such as the petty jealousies, already hinted at, among the literary coteries of the day. In addition to this, the constant shifting of residential centers, in the rapid expansion of the city, inevitably tended more and more to separate persons of kindred interests. The Athenæum was fondly expected to be a sort of neighborhood or social club among the leading people of the community,<sup>1</sup> a hope dissipated by the swiftly advancing tide of business. So the great majority of its members transferred allegiance to the Society Library, becoming participants in its varying fortunes, whose narration is now to be resumed.

club and a library"; the fact that many persons were members of both institutions; the "public utility" certain to result from "such combined resources, local, personal and literary"; the expressed approval of many Library shareholders and "some" Trustees; and lastly the probability of amalgamation "without infringing upon the existent privileges of the members of the elder and to the vast mutual advantages of both" institutions.

This association, modeled after the Athenæum Club of London, made so famous through the membership of Browning, Bulwer, Carlyle, Dickens, Tennyson and Thackeray, was "intended for a *rendezvous*" of professional persons, men

of letters, "and other citizens of kindred tastes." The Trustees of the Library, however, without much ado deemed the very complacent proposition "inexpedient to entertain." The club experienced a brief period of prosperity, with headquarters in various places, but finally, through extravagant management, was obliged to dissolve, late in 1869, at the sound of the auctioneer's hammer.

<sup>1</sup> Proof of this may be seen in the fact that the elegant Union Club, the oldest purely social organization in New York to-day, dating from June, 1836, was founded within the precincts of the Athenæum, at Broadway and Chambers street.

## VIII

1829-1854

**A**LTHOUGH little disposition was evinced by the general community toward a vigorous support of its literary institutions,—as has already been seen, and as will continue to appear in succeeding pages,—nevertheless the spirit of letters was abroad, manifesting itself in a natural drawing together of congenial minds. There was, for example, the Kent Club, comprising, besides the learned Chancellor, Dr. J. Augustine Smith, Peter A. Jay, Professors N. F. Moore, John McVickar and James Renwick, the Rev. Drs. Wainwright and Mathews, Samuel F. B. Morse and Albert Gallatin. Another association was called the Literary Confederacy, whose membership included such men as Gulian C. Verplanck, William Cullen Bryant and Robert M. Sands, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. For all these litterateurs, for the wits and no less for persons of fashion, the Society Library afforded an inviting meeting-place, in the days when elegant manners and polished conversation—fully as much as a substantial bank account—were indispensable passports to good society. It was to be expected, therefore, that the Trustees of the institution would be chosen from this choice constituency.

On surveying the new names in the trusteeship, one is confronted, in sharp contrast to the last period, with an array of fully fifty additional personalities, with a consequent average tenure of but little over five years. Still, a few long terms are found: Major Joseph Delafield, lawyer and scientist as well as soldier, serving for thirteen years; Joshua Coit, a lawyer renowned for social graces, James De Peyster Ogden, eminent merchant, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and ever the stanch Democrat and Unionist, and Dayton Hobart, son of the great bishop, lawyer and wit, author of the parody on "The House that Jack Built,"—each of these for fourteen years; another gentleman-lawyer of the old school was Alexander Robertson Rodgers, younger brother of Dr. J. Kearney Rodgers, a classical scholar, witty, genial and kind, acting as Treasurer through all but four of his seventeen years' term as Trustee; William Inglis, judge in the common pleas court, an active Whig in politics, a devout booklover always, but little given to society, though ever eager to aid younger lawyers, a Trustee and Secretary of the board for eighteen years; and Stephen C. Williams and Frederic De Peyster, whose long though interrupted official connection of twenty-two and twenty-eight years, respectively, began within this period, both bred as lawyers, though more particularly devoted to the social and cultural movements of their day.

None of the others held office for as many as ten years, the Hon. James H. Titus, assemblyman and leather dealer, serving for nine years; as also Charles M. Leupp, another "Swamp" merchant, an active member of the Chamber of Commerce, and later president of the Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen; the Hon.



At a Common Council held at the City Hall of the  
said City on Tuesday the second day of June Anno  
Domini 1770

Present

Robert Lushington Esq Mayor  
Francis Hampton Esq Recorder

John Bugar  
Hermanus Bangelder  
Shilsep Portland  
Frederick Philipse  
Gerardus Huyvoert

} Elders Aldermen.

John Roosevelt  
Obadiah Hunt  
Samuel Key  
Andrew Toller  
John Chambers

} Assistants

Ordered the Mayor give his Warrant to the Treasurer to pay to Herman —  
Bussing Robert Campbell Jacobsse van Maaspoelen, Jacobus Delamontagne  
Michael Cornelisse and John Delamontagne the Watch and Bellmen of this  
City or Order the sum of six and thirty pounds first Money of New York in  
full of their salary due and ending the first day of May last.

Ordered that Alderman Bangelder, Alderman Portland be a Committee to agree  
with six able Citizens of this City to be the Watch and Bellmen of the said City  
untill the first day of November next and make their Report to the next Common  
Council.

The Committee appointed to receive the Library of Books presented to the Corporation  
by the Honorable Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts have made  
their Report in the words following (Viz) We the Committee above mentioned do  
Report that pursuant to the above Order We did receive the above mentioned  
Twenty three Cases of Books containing sixteen hundred and forty two Volumes  
which Cases we opened and took the Books out and put them in the Assembly  
Room of which Alderman Philipse has the Key. And we are of Opinion that the  
Room Opposite to the Common Council Room in the City Hall will be a proper place  
for depositing the said Books and that the same be made convenient as soon as  
may be but the manner of doing thereof we humbly Refer to the Consideration  
of this Board.

Edoet van Gorpman  
John Chambers

Hermanus Bangelder  
Frederick Philipse  
John Roosevelt

which Report is approved and Ordered the same Committee do forthwith Employ  
Workmen and Scaffolds Materials for fitting up a convenient Room or Chamber

James W. Beekman, officer in many literary, historical and benevolent institutions, a generous but unassuming benefactor of the needy and the unfortunate; and John H. Gourlie, prominent in commercial affairs, and a lecturer on economic subjects.

Of the short-term Trustees, by far the most eminent, of world-wide fame indeed, was Washington Irving, a life-long member of the Library, which he mentions as the "City Library" in his "Knickerbocker" history. Though a Trustee but two years, he gave substantial assistance on the Library Committee. Another name on the roll of public honor is that of Enos T. Throop, governor of this state from 1831 to 1833, and afterward useful in the diplomatic service.

As "old merchants" appear, besides some already enumerated, the names of John R. Townsend and William A. Lawrence, of the China trade, Augustus Fleming, Jacob Harvey, and Jonathan Sturges, a merchant prince indeed, a generous patron of art always, and of institutions to relieve suffering; as also Robert B. Minturn, first president of the Union League Club, a founder of St. Luke's Hospital, a man of such wise and tender benevolence, that his life, said George William Curtis, was "a public blessing," and his death, "a universal sorrow."

As men especially interested in letters, aside from those named above, appear Charles Baldwin, associate of Peter A. Jay, David S. Jones, John Ferguson, William A. Duer and others in their literary society; Dr. Henry J. Anderson, accomplished linguist, professor of mathematics and astronomy in Columbia College and its one-time librarian; Nathaniel F. Moore, nephew of Bishop Moore, elegant classical scholar, professor of

Latin and Greek and afterward president of Columbia College, whose earliest library catalogue was his work; Joseph G. Cogswell, first superintendent of the Astor Library, adviser and close personal friend of both John Jacob and William B. Astor; and Charles Astor Bristed, grandson and nephew of these two last-named, a delightful conversationalist, a ripe scholar, and a charming writer under the pen-name of "Carl Benson."

From the ranks of professional men were drawn more lawyers than others, including, in addition to those already mentioned, James Campbell, the scholarly surrogate; John Anthon, one of the founders and fourth president of the New York Law Institute; William H. Harison, of an ancient family of metropolitan lawyers, dating to the early 18th century, a trustee also of Columbia College, long a vestryman, comptroller and a warden of Trinity parish, for four years Treasurer of the Library; William Samuel Johnson, an assistant alderman, son-in-law of that captain of industry, William Walton Woolsey; Charles G. Ferris, active as an alderman and in Congress, where he materially aided Samuel F. B. Morse in securing an appropriation toward the first telegraph line, between Baltimore and Washington; Edgar Evertson; Henry Nicoll, of the distinguished family that gave a member to the first board of Trustees in 1754; Charles A. Clinton, son of the great governor, for many years clerk of the superior court in this city; and last, but by no means least eminent, William Kent, son of the celebrated jurist, himself a practitioner of high repute, judge of the circuit court, holding a law professorship at Harvard, a founder and a lecturer of the New York University law department, sometime



librarian of the Law Institute, a man of engaging address, a charter member of the Union Club.

The medical fraternity had but a slender representation: Dr. James E. DeKay, noted naturalist and social favorite, friend of Audubon, Drake and Halleck, a founder of the Academy of Medicine, a man of wide travel, author of "Sketches of Turkey by an American," and compiler of a monumental work on the zoölogy of New York state; while the only other physician was Dr. Andrew Hamersley, remembered as one of the truly elegant men of the day.

Five clergymen gave of their literary taste and judgment to the Library councils: the Rev. John F. Schroeder, assistant minister of Trinity parish, a devoted student and lecturer, particularly in the field of oriental literature; the Rev. Jonathan M. Wainwright, then rector of Grace Church, afterward of St. Paul's, Boston, and again in New York as assistant rector of Old Trinity and provisional bishop of the diocese, representing the American house of bishops at the sesquicentennial of the "Venerable Society," at London in 1852; the Rev. Dr. William Berrian, eighth rector of Trinity parish; the Rev. Dr. Benjamin I. Haight, rector of All Saints' Church, for many years professor in the General Seminary and assistant rector of Old Trinity, in preference to the bishopric of Massachusetts; and the Rev. Orville Dewey, one of the most noted of Unitarian divines, who gave great congregations in his Church of the Messiah on Broadway "such preaching as had never been heard in New York before," blending "the force of Edwards, the fire of Whitefield, the tenderness of Summerfield, and the strong conviction of Mason."

In conclusion: Daniel Embury, president of the Atlantic Bank of Brooklyn, owner of a notable private library; Anthony Barclay, for years British consul at New York, a noted clubman and social favorite; Henry Brevoort, Jr., and Rufus L. Lord, former Directors of the Athenæum and ever prominent in the advancement of culture; Daniel Seymour, James I. Jones and Edward Jones, men of wealth and scholarly refinement; William Templeton Johnson, owner of a splendid collection of paintings; and Peter Augustus Schermerhorn, a gentleman of unbounded philanthropic interests.

Generally speaking, it would not be inapt to characterize the period from 1830 to 1850 in the history of the Society Library as preëminently the times that tried the Trustees' souls. In addition to oppressive financial difficulties, there was heaped upon the management—itsself composed of strong-minded gentlemen not seldom divided in opinion—criticism amounting to obloquy, some of which has survived in the form of pamphlets and further exploitation in the daily press.

In the spring of 1832 came the first recorded attempt to oust any of the board from office, since the election of 1795; but it met with no success. Nevertheless, the following year a still more determined and systematic effort was put forth in the same direction. It resulted in unseating three of the Trustees, in whose ranks no change had taken place for seven years.

According to the first<sup>1</sup> pamphlet of the series, it was a matter of reproach that "an institution emphatically

<sup>1</sup>*Address to the Stockholders of the City Library, on the Management and Actual Condition of that Institution.* New York, 1833. An unsigned, 16-page pamphlet, with yellow paper cover, ordered printed

at an adjourned meeting of stockholders, March 26, 1833, and to be "circulated among the members." A single copy is in the possession of the New York Historical Society.

called the 'CITY LIBRARY' " should, after eighty years' standing, be held "so low in the public estimation." This melancholy stagnation, made the more conspicuous by current enthusiasm in societies far more recently established, such as the Athenæum, the Historical Society, the Apprentices', Mercantile and Clinton Hall Associations, was attributed to: (1) the perpetuation of "absurd and antiquated regulations"; (2) a remissness in attending Trustee meetings; and (3) the jealous, "close-borough" attitude of the board toward honest inquiry or suggestion from interested subscribers.

Certainly no lack of loyalty could be charged to the authors of the protest from the sentiments of the concluding paragraph, when, disclaiming any personal feeling or intentional disrespect, they say:

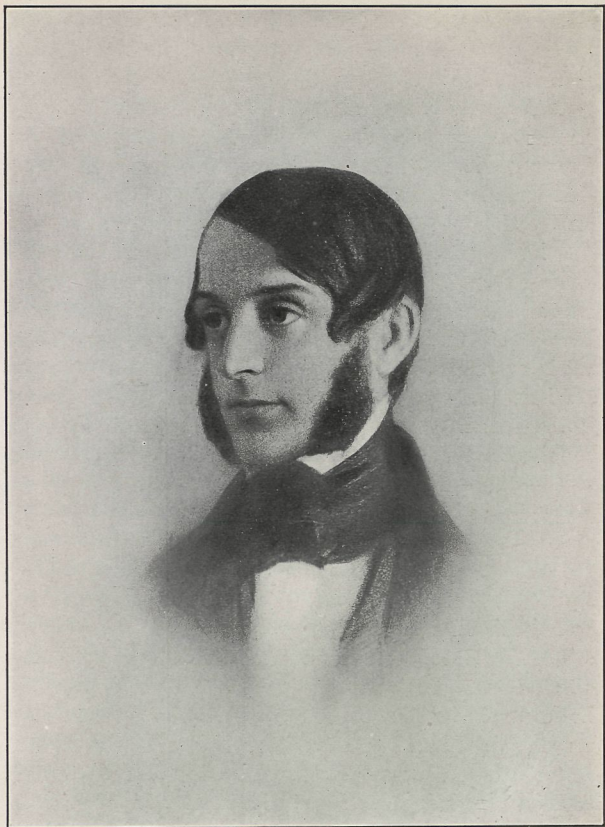
We earnestly desire to see the chief literary establishment of our beloved city upon a scale commensurate with her wealth and intelligence, and to place it upon such a footing that instead of being the opprobrium it may eventually become the ornament and the boast of New-York. We humbly hope that by a thorough change in the direction, new life and renewed vigor will be given to an institution which has been peacefully slumbering for nearly a century.

The Trustees, stung to utterance, at once replied in kind,<sup>1</sup> observing slurringly that the complaints had come from persons but lately admitted to membership, and therefore excusable for not being better "acquainted with the history and the means of the Library from its foundation." A résumé of its career and

<sup>1</sup> *Address of the Trustees of the New York Society Library to the Members of the Society, Relative to the Management and Present Condi-*

*tion of that Institution.* New York, 1833. A 12-page pamphlet. A single copy is in the Columbia University Library.





Peter Augustus Schermerhorn  
Trustee, 1840-1841



hounding difficulties was presented, with a flat denial of all charges, the members being asked to endorse the present board at election-time.

In hot haste there was next thrown out a "Reply to the Manifesto of the Trustees of the City Library,"<sup>1</sup> issued by "A Plebeian." Couched in terms of biting sarcasm and personal abuse too intense to carry weight, it is to-day simply an amusing specimen of satirical rhetoric. The guardians of the Library are variously styled "very respectable gentlemen," "venerable octogenarians," or "merry old souls," as the writer's humor changes play. In contrast to "new, young members," impudent enough to ask for the voting list,—"a demand" withheld as not "in any way connected with the good of the Library," say the Trustees,—"venerable gentlemen, whose existence was nearly forgotten, will, on the day of election, make their appearance to vote for the friends of their youth; and by these and other honorable means, they fancy their election sure."

Then comes a sharp passage, in which the Trustees are termed "our servants, our agents, everything but our masters. Have we not made you, and can we not unmake you again? . . . If we cannot learn by whom you are kept in office, we shall, at least, compel you to give an account of your transactions." But the final sentence is more pacific: "We have done; we have endeavored to stir up our dignified agents 'with a long pole'; and if our labor has been in vain, we must good-naturedly abide the issue."

A selection or two from the attentive press shows the notice paid the dispute by the public. Canny editors aimed

<sup>1</sup> A copy is in the Library of the Historical Society.



only to give a plain, unbiassed abstract of the statements and arguments of both parties, to the end that those interested might have fully before them the means of judging of the merits of the question, and that, by the mere fact of publishing the representations of both sides, more care in the management of the institution (if there had been any remission in these particulars) might be induced for the future.<sup>1</sup>

This same oracle remarks<sup>2</sup> that "the indifference with which it [the Library] is regarded, springs partly from the fact that most people hearing little of it have almost forgotten it"; predicts confidently that "a little stir, therefore, concerning the Library is a good omen"; and voices a wide-felt sentiment in the opinion:

Whatever may be the merits, or the final decision of the controversy in question, we hope it may have the effect of awaking attention to a most important public institution; that it will increase the revenues and extent of the Library, and make it, what to our discredit, it is not, a collection of books bearing some proportion to the wealth and population of our city.

Loyal supporters of each side are impartially given hearings in the newspaper columns, but in the main they simply affirm or amplify the pamphlet utterances. A few extracts will suffice: "G. M. W.," in championing the board, observes: "It may seem surprising that such unfounded allegations should be advanced, but the enigma is readily solved when we know that the objectors are men who would have no objection to the office of Trustee." Such persons are denominated "those candidates, . . . who abound in interested declamation."<sup>3</sup>

Again, under the pen-name "Recent,"<sup>4</sup> a partisan of

<sup>1</sup> From the *Evening Post*, April 29, 1833.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 18, 1833.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, April 18, 1833.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, April 26, 1833.

the reformers in scholarly parlance sees the Trustees actuated in their "Address" by the favorite principle of Horace, "*Odi profanum vulgus et arceo*"; while, on the other hand, the protesting shareholders do but "adopt the sentiments of Hudibras, when he concludes:

'It is in vain,  
I see, to argue 'gainst the grain,  
Or like the stars incline men to  
What they 're themselves averse to do.'

Another zealot of the opposition, cast in an equally classic mold, over the signature "*Alethes kai Eleutheros*,"<sup>1</sup> speaks out "candidly" against "inveterate office-holding." He presents "Three Facts," to show "the self-respect, modesty and disinterested zeal" of "the present direction [which] has been gazing for twenty years on the venerable dust and cobwebs accumulating on the not-to-be-approached treasures of the Library's parchment and sheep-skin." From this evidence the public will "fully appreciate the incapacity" of the incumbents, and thereby "infer the tenacity with which the respectable gentlemen cling to their seats, the comfortable seats in which they have so long been accustomed to doze."

A last word comes from the fair-minded "X,"<sup>2</sup> who has read all the articles and pamphlets, "without feeling entirely satisfied with any," and who disclaims "connexion with either of the contending parties." From this circumstance he arrogates to himself the privilege of freely arraigning the management, regarding "the prospect of change with pleasure, and anxiety that it may

<sup>1</sup> From the *Evening Post*, April 29, 1833.

<sup>2</sup> From the *New-York American*, April 29, 1833.

be realized," for, "when an old institution has settled on its lees, almost any change is advantageous." The Society Library, he judicially opines,

is not what it ought to be, nor what it might be made; it is no credit to our city, and of very slight utility to the reading public. What 's the design of a *Public Library*? Not, surely, to afford facilities for novel reading, and serve as an auxiliary for the dissemination of the evanescent, generally trifling, and too often vapid periodical literature of the day! No; but to provide the studious with means of access to works not within ordinary reach.

Inasmuch as this communication is somewhat anti-climactic, there will be given in conclusion what should have been its peroration:

The Trustees complain of stinted patronage. On the other hand, I complain of *them* that they have not procured better patronage. Do they expect the public to seek out an object for its support? You remember the painting of Timoleon, Mr. Editor? Our good Trustees seem to think that it embodied both truth and fitness; they would gladly have fortune throw her scoop net, and bring books, bequests, and subscribers to the old building in Nassau street, while they, good souls, sleep on and take their rest!

As has been said, the movement was only partially successful, the new members of the board comprising the Rev. John F. Schroeder, Jonathan M. Wainwright, D.D., and Dr. James E. DeKay; but the closeness of the election is revealed in a brief newspaper report, that "there wanted but three votes more to have ensured the success of the entire 'Reformed Ticket.'"<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, moreover, that Mr. Verplanck and Professor

<sup>1</sup> From the *Evening Post*, May 1, 1833.



Renwick were on both lists, so that the opposition might properly claim five representatives; yet, strangely enough, not one of these, save Mr. Verplanck, was ever again elected.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, it is not surprising to meet with traces of a renewed agitation within two years, though not as pronounced, nor so widely bruited in the papers. The one bit of surviving evidence is a single-sheet circular, issued "To the Shareholders of the New-York Society Library,"<sup>2</sup> in April, 1835, by Messrs. William N. Clark, George Bruce, William H. Harison, William Emerson, William Kent, John D. Ogden and S. C. Williams.

While its tone is far more temperate than that of earlier pamphlets, its object is the same and no less determined. Rehearsing the fate of preceding efforts, the address bemoans "the present state" of the institution, urging the election of carefully nominated persons to "give their best attention to the interests of the Library." The subjoined list includes five<sup>3</sup> "in the present board," together with two former Trustees.<sup>4</sup> The old board being reëlected with a single exception,<sup>5</sup>—and he not one of their choice,—the dissatisfied members had to be content, as before, with the nominees on both ballots.

One probable good result of the agitation was that in February, 1836, the sum of \$2000 was ordered spent for European books, more than for the preceding five years taken together; but it must be remembered that this was the board that sold the old building and consequently had funds at its disposal. Furthermore, the records

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wainwright resigned in January, 1834, having been called to Boston.

<sup>2</sup> A copy is in the Library of the New York Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Laight, John An-

thon, Gulian C. Verplanck, Henry J. Anderson and James Campbell.

<sup>4</sup> J. Augustine Smith, M.D., and the Rev. John F. Schroeder.

<sup>5</sup> Washington Irving *vice* Gov. Enos T. Throop.

show a noticeable change in 1837, when nine new names appear on the report of the election committee. It was by this quasi-new board that the questions involving the union with the Athenæum and the erection of a new building were fought over, as already related in the last chapter, culminating in the bitter contest of 1838. Still another battle of the same sort was waged in 1842, but it also resulted in the complete triumph of the administration, every one of the fifteen Trustees being reëlected.

At this point, in connection with the last-named objects,—the Athenæum merger and the new building,—attention must again be directed to the tendency toward an identification of several or all of the city's literary interests; for this phenomenon was to continue to manifest itself for some years to come. As heretofore, the impulse arose from a lack of financial support in the various institutions, rather than from any wide-spread conviction of the fitness of such a consolidation, or from any deep-seated longing on the part of individual societies. Each was naturally jealous of its own special mission and entity, and only through grinding necessity would any one of them consent to make or to entertain overtures, even for association merely. The movement was largely materialistic, then, springing from the belief that upon union depended, not only solidarity or strength, but actual existence.

The next suggestion looking to such merging comes from a wholly new source. In July, 1830, a letter was read to the board from the Rev. Dr. James M. Mathews, in behalf of "The University of the City of New York." The communication begins by saying that enough subscriptions had been received to "place the accomplishment of the object beyond a peradventure." From the

outset, however, it had been "the ardent wish of the friends and projectors of the University to unite, so far as practicable, the resources of the several existing Literary Institutions in our City, on such terms and to such extent as would best promote their common interests and usefulness." It was accordingly proposed to the Trustees, "that suitable apartments for their library be furnished by the University, on condition that free access to the use of said library be allowed to the members of the University for reference." Despite the statement that similar proposals had been accepted by the Lyceum of Natural History and the Historical Society, the board, "after due deliberation," voted the measure "inexpedient at this time."<sup>1</sup>

Hard upon this offer there began a succession of schemes relative to "a change of location." In presenting them it will be unnecessary to repeat the course of the Athenæum negotiations, already discussed. Between November, 1832, and January, 1835, a desultory enterprise was afoot, on the part of the Library, the Athenæum and the Historical Society, toward jointly leasing land of Columbia College in Murray street; but no action was taken beyond a consideration of the terms submitted by the college trustees.<sup>2</sup>

Within this same period two overtures were made to the Corporation of the city for relief. In December, 1832, a petition was ordered drafted, "praying the grant of a piece of land near the City Hall, for the erection of a new building for the use of the Library."

<sup>1</sup> See also p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> See Library minutes, Feb. 4, Mch. 25, Apl. 1, Nov. 4, 1829; Nov. 7, 1832; May 3, June 3, 11, 1833; Jan. 6, 1834; Jan. 26, 1835; Athenæum minutes, May 6, Dec. 6, 1833;

Jan. 13, 1834; May 4, 1835; Historical Society minutes, May 14, 1833; Columbia College minutes, Jan. 7, June 5, Dec. 4, 1833; Feb. 5, 1834.



Spread upon the proceedings of the board of assistants of the Common Council, in January, 1833, is found the following "Report and Resolution of the Committee on Arts and Sciences, on the petition of the Trustees of the New York Society Library":

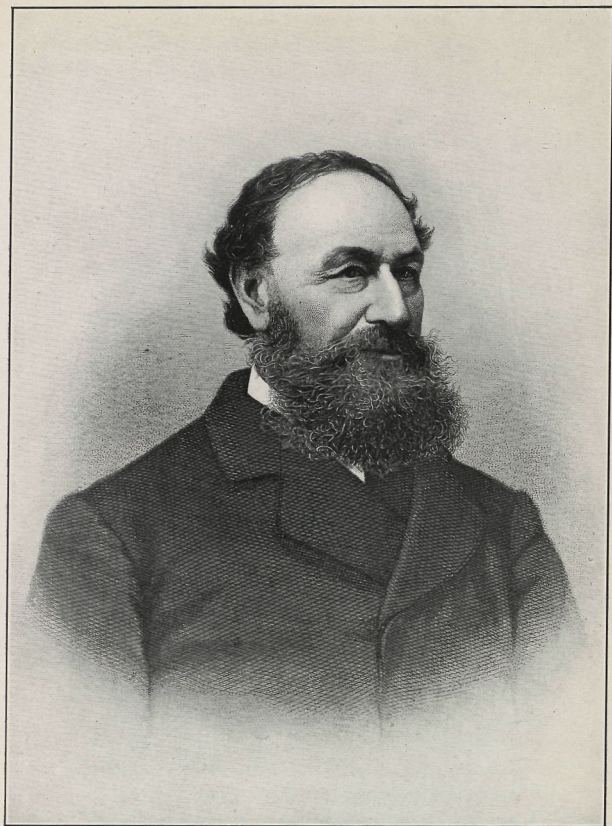
*Resolved*, That as it has heretofore been considered inexpedient to remove the building called the Bridewell, that it be assigned to the New York Society Library on the following conditions:

That it shall be ornamented and fitted up by the Trustees in conformity with the plans which shall be decided upon by the Mayor and Committee on Arts and Sciences of the two Boards [*i.e.*, aldermen and assistants]; and the building be held by said Trustees so long only as it shall by them be used as their Library, or so long as the Common Council shall not make any other disposition of the property; in which last case the Trustees of the Library are to be repaid such proportion of their expenditure as shall be decided upon by three respectable citizens, to be chosen one by the Common Council, one by the Trustees, and the third by the two so chosen; and on the further condition, that the *present* and *future* Members of the Common Council, and the Heads of Departments of the City Government, shall have free access to the books of the Library in the said building.

This resolution was never acted upon, its consideration meeting with one postponement after another. Possibly it was "killed" by Library members, hostile to the "ill-omened measure," as it is styled in the pamphlet, "Address to the Stockholders of the City Library,"<sup>1</sup> which complains that the petition had been presented, "without reference to the opinions or wishes of the members, although by the terms of the application . . . it is proposed to sink the whole capital of the society for an indefinite term of years." This remonstrance was answered as follows in the "Address of the Trustees."<sup>2</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> See p. 369*n*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 370*n*.



Hon. Frederic de Peyster, LL.D.

Trustee, 1840–1855; 1869–1882. Chairman, 1870–1882





The present Trustees have been long desirous of obtaining for the Library a more central location. The only means they have of doing so, however, is by the sale of their present building; and being of opinion that, although the sum which would remain after the payment of the incumbrance on their property would be sufficient to erect a suitable building, but not sufficient to purchase ground also in a good situation, they determined to apply to the Common Council of the city, for the use of some piece of public ground in the neighborhood of the City Hall, upon which they might erect a building, creditable to the city and themselves, and offering to the Corporation free access to the books for themselves and the officers of the state and general governments. On the presentation of their petition, the friends of the Library in the Common Council suggested that there was but little chance of obtaining ground for the purpose desired, but the building formerly used as a Bridewell might be obtained. Of course the Trustees did not object, and that matter is yet pending in the Common Council.

A parting shot was discharged at this plan by "A Plebeian," in his caustic "Reply to the Manifesto of the Trustees of the City Library,"<sup>1</sup> as follows:

The Trustees have not yet got into the Bridewell, but they hope to reach that venerable Elysium; of course they did not ask for it, oh no; this would have been descending from their dignity; but some of their friends in the Common Council suggested it, and upon the valuable consideration of being permitted to read the *rare and valuable* works in the Library, the corporation, it is stated, are desirous of accommodating the Trustees. We humbly hope that no alderman will be permitted to take out our rare oriental manuscripts, without making an equivalent deposit, nor should our representatives in Assembly or Congress, be permitted to carry off our *editiones principes*, without the personal guarantee of two respectable householders. Our valuable MSS. from Herculaneum and Pompeii, and that rarest of rarities, the proofsheets of Webster's Spellingbook, should be

<sup>1</sup> See p. 371.

kept from the vulgar gaze of the ward inspectors; nor should our costly monuments of Peruvian and Araucanian literature be lightly exposed to the romantic enthusiasm of the various officers connected with the City-hall.

Whatever may have caused the failure of this object at the time, it was not forgotten; in November, 1834, less than two years later, a committee was deputed to confer with the Corporation, "for a lease of the Bridewell." No record of a petition appears in the Common Council minutes, doubtless because at just this time it was voted to demolish the edifice in question, "as soon as a proper prison for the confinement of debtors can be provided elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, in June, 1833, the location committee was ascertaining the price of leasing certain lots on Broadway between Chambers and Warren streets, as also the cost of building; but no report was rendered. Again, in 1834-1835, another committee was investigating "the practicability of purchasing the Church of Dr. McLeod" in Chambers street, a brick structure built in 1815 opposite the old "Institution," as a house of worship for the Reformed Scotch Presbyterians. The non-success of these attempts was a foregone conclusion, to judge by the appended criticism from disaffected members:

And the whole progress made during the last year towards providing a more convenient place for the Library has been the

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Aldermen*, Nov. 17, 1834. The old bridewell, here alluded to, was a plain, two-story structure of dark-grey stone, erected in 1775-1776, in the west of the park. Its accommodations had been long outgrown, while its nearness to the City Hall was an offense, architecturally as well as

morally. Torn down in 1838-1839, on the completion of the city prison, or old "Tombs,"—for whose composition much of its stone was used,—its memory has since been chiefly associated with the sufferings of American patriots confined there during the Revolution. So we must again own to a feeling of relief that

appointment within a few days of a committee to inquire respecting the Scotch Presbyterian Church in Chambers-street; a matter that had been before fully investigated, and found to be impracticable by reason of the price demanded, a pending litigation, and the situation of the premises relatively to other buildings, were the price within our means.<sup>1</sup>

Other projects—such as leasing a portion of the house at 14 Vesey street, lately bought by the Athenæum, a suggestion considered early in 1834—were set aside by the inability to dispose of the Nassau Street property. Nevertheless, not wishing to let a rare chance slip by, and encouraged by a rise in down-town real estate, in June, 1835, the Trustees, in conjunction with the Directors of the Athenæum, purchased for \$47,500 the valuable lots on Broadway and Leonard street, as above set forth.<sup>2</sup> Fortune soon further favored them, for, at a special meeting of the board, February 16, 1836, the exciting announcement was made

That on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> instant, through the agency of James Bleecker & Sons, the Library lot and premises were sold to William W. Townsend for \$44,200. The terms of sale were: ten per cent. down; \$10,000 on the delivery of the deed, on or before the first of May next; and the balance either in cash, or on bond and mortgage, with lawful interest, at the option of the purchaser<sup>3</sup>; the Society to have the privilege of removing the book cases and fixtures appertaining to the Library. The sale was very satisfactory to the committee; and they trust it will meet the approbation of the Board.

the Library was never housed in this building, a notion even less agreeable to entertain than the old almshouse proposition. See pp. 296–297.

<sup>1</sup> From a circular, *To the Shareholders of the New-York Society Library*. New York, April, 1835.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 343–344.

<sup>3</sup> On May 3d the deed, “duly executed by a majority of the Trustees, was delivered to Messrs. Townsend & Brothers,” the latter having paid \$14,200 in cash and given a bond and mortgage for \$30,000 for one year at seven per cent., payable semi-annually.



Needless to say, the good news met with the full sanction of the Trustees, who at once bade the same gentlemen, Messrs. Bancker, Laight and Verplanck, to consummate the bargain. Thanks were then voted to the Athenæum for its courteous offer of the Directors' room, while the Trustees might be "deprived of their usual place of meeting." In conclusion the committee was further empowered to hire the Mechanics' Society's building, "or some other suitable apartments, to take the necessary measures, and to defray all expenses for removing the Library."<sup>1</sup>

There must have been jubilation unrestrained and much rubbing of hands over the announcement. Small wonder the board "approved." Less than two years before it had been impossible to get \$30,000 for the property, which in 1821, and even as lately as 1831, had been appraised at but half that sum. Furthermore, the price received was only \$3300 less than the combined cost of the two new lots on Broadway, of double its extent. The terms, as finally adjusted, included cash payment of \$14,200 by the Messrs. Townsend, with a bond and mortgage of \$30,000 for one year at seven per cent., interest payable semi-annually. The compact with Mr. Clark for the Broadway property was even more advantageous to the Library—at the time. He was given a bond and mortgage for \$14,000 at six per cent., payable half-yearly, and \$7500 in cash on the conveyance of the lot, the deed bearing date of April 30, 1836.

On April 12, 1836, the Trustees held their last meet-

<sup>1</sup> The sale was effected at the height of the inflation of New York real estate, just prior to the disastrous panic of 1837. A notice of the transaction, along with several other

important transfers, appeared in the *American* of the same date,—an evidence of reportorial despatch not unworthy of present-day journalism.

At a Meeting of the Trustees of  
the New York Library, at the City Arms  
on Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1754.

Present. His Honor J. D. Laney Lt. Gov.  
Mr. Murray  
Mr. Chambers  
Mr. Barclay  
Mr. Walton  
Mr. Watts  
Mr. Benz. Nicoll  
Mr. W<sup>m</sup> Livingston  
Mr. W<sup>m</sup> Alexander  
Mr. W<sup>m</sup> J. Smith.

Resolved. That Mr. Watts, Mr. Nicoll, Mr. W<sup>m</sup>  
Alexander & Mr. John Livingston do receive  
the Subscription Money from the several  
Subscribers, in order to be laid out in Books  
for the Library. Which Service They have

agreed

ing in the old Nassau Street building, which for exactly forty-one years had been their official home. Many of them could not recall the time before it stood there; while to them all, as to the great body of the citizens, it was one of the landmarks of New York. Associations and memories must have clustered about the venerable structure in profusion; yet not a trace of feeling is discernible in the even tenor of the minutes. This was the hour for rejoicing, not for sentimental regret; the reward had been slow in coming, but come it had at last; achievement and enlarged responsibilities alike pointed only to the future.

It became at once necessary to make a satisfactory change of station, until a new building should be up and ready. By June it appears the Library had been safely ensconced in the building of the Mechanics' Society, at 12 Chambers street. It was a thrifty move, in view of the location and the accommodations offered, and "more especially as the basement is under-let for the yearly rent of \$100 and the rooms in the third story remain to be disposed of." The original lease was for two years, at a rental of \$1200 per annum, payable quarterly; as events turned out, however, this sojourn was extended to a little over four years."<sup>1</sup>

At the first meeting of the board in the Chambers Street building, June 13th, a letter dated May 11th was read from Mr. William Beach Lawrence, asking in

<sup>1</sup> This building, erected in 1821 as the "Mechanics' School and Apprentices' Library," by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, was a three-story, unpretentious, brick structure, 27x51 feet in dimensions. But little changed in outward appearance, it survived many vicissitudes, until demolished in July, 1907,

to make way for the new Manhattan terminal of the Brooklyn Bridge. See *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New-York*, Thomas Earle and Charles T. Congdon, Editors, New York, 1882; and also A. T. Goodrich, *The Picture of New York and Stranger's Guide*, 1828.



behalf of the Historical Society on what terms its collections might be housed in the proposed Library building, and whether the Trustees could offer temporary shelter pending the completion of the edifice. "After a short deliberation," the board voted to tender gratuitously to the Historical Society a large room on the third floor of the lately leased building, "for their temporary accommodation," naturally reserving a consideration of "their further application for a permanent location," until a new building should be erected.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly before the original lease of the building of the Mechanics' Society was to expire, the Trustees received, early in February, 1838, an urgent solicitation from the directors of the Stuyvesant Institute to remove to its attractive abode. The letter, dated January 29th and signed by Messrs. William Kent, Samuel Alley and I. Green Pearson, bespeaks at least a "candid consideration," for the proffered apartments were "admirably adapted for the purposes" of the Library, and the committee was "not aware of any objection to the local situation" of the Institute. The Trustees, however, were too certain of their new building, and too uncertain when it would be an actuality, to make another move before that happy day should dawn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Historical Society, which could complain of neglect and lack of appreciation more justly than any of the worthy institutions of that day, had for some months been pluckily struggling to regain its footing. In Jan., 1836, its trustees had met, after the lapse of rather more than two years, to authorize conferences with the Society Library, the Athenæum, the City Lyceum, "or any other institution, whose building will be completed within the present year," in order "to procure permanent accommodations." Under the

circumstances it was evidently deemed best to put aside the Library offer; and indeed, long before plans of the new building were even draughted, the errant Historical Society had, by the summer of 1837, gratefully found an asylum in the lately finished Stuyvesant Institute. See minutes of the trustees of the Historical Society; and also Robert Hendre Kelby, *The New York Historical Society: 1804-1904*, New York, 1905, pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup>The Stuyvesant Institute, named in honor of Peter G. Stuyvesant,

In the spring of 1841, the Historical Society, through Messrs. Hamilton Fish, Archibald Russell and George W. Folsom, was again making overtures to other institutions, regarding "terms of mutual accommodation." The joint committee, comprising Stephen C. Williams, Dayton Hobart and A. Robertson Rodgers of the Trustees, recommended a four-fold plan for a temporary association of the two institutions under one roof, with an exchange of privileges, the Society to introduce and pay the annual dues of between two and three hundred members, who, however, could not vote in Library meetings.

These recommendations, like so many before, were, in May, deemed "inexpedient"; though the board had "no objection to a union . . . upon such terms of equality as would best promote the interests of both institutions and the cause of literature generally." At the same time, as an earnest of good will, the gratuitous use of one of the basement stores—for which two apartments the Library was presently to draw rentals of \$400 and \$600—was "tendered to the Historical Society for the deposit of their property until they can obtain suitable accommodations,"—an offer "respectfully declined" by the latter body, then about to accept a proposed lease of apartments in New York University on Washington square.

To return to the Library, just removed to the Mechanics' Society building. With the institution fairly settled in this temporary abode, we may now properly gather up loose ends of the narrative in other matters.

was organized in 1834 by leading citizens, "for the diffusion of knowledge, by means of popular lectures, and to establish a reading room, library, cabinet of natural history, &c." Unfortunately for the causes it represented, however, no less than

for the hopes of its founders, this institution had an even shorter life than the Athenæum; early in 1841 foreclosure proceedings were brought against the association, and it was not long afterward dissolved.

Looking closely into the affairs of the Library during the period in review, one finds nothing sensational to mention besides these contested elections, the sale of the old and the erection of the new building, negotiations with other institutions, and the final absorption of the Athenæum. A regular routine was observed in conformity with the by-laws; and even these same exciting campaigns caused no jarring of the administrative machinery, defeated "reformers" acquiescing dutifully, if not cheerfully, in the issue.

Throughout this epoch the old custom still obtained of choosing a chairman at each meeting of the Trustees. There was thus never an absence of that functionary, though no special prerogatives attached to the position. The names most often occurring in this capacity are those of Messrs. Laight, Morgan and Berrian, Mr. Verplanck not being called to the chair until May, 1828, after he had served on the board for eighteen years.

As always, the executive work was performed by the Library Committee, in accord with the by-laws, its members being chosen with other officers at the first assembling of each new board. In 1836 its number was increased from three to five, and, by an amendment of 1839, two of its members were to be the Secretary and the Treasurer, *ex officio*. After 1840 the reports of the Library Committee were either rendered orally, or filed away, without transcription in the minutes. The gentlemen of longest standing in its membership were Messrs. Morgan, Verplanck, J. Augustine Smith, Dayton Hobart and William Inglis. It was the usual practice to reappoint the faithful.

Several changes were made in the daily opening of the Library to its patrons. From December, 1812, until



May, 1830, the hours were from ten to two, Sundays and holidays excepted. It was then voted to keep open from nine to three until November 1st; a year later the time was amended to read from ten to three, "and in the afternoon from 4 to 6 o'clock." In May, 1832, the Library Committee was given "discretionary power to direct the opening of the Library in the afternoon." During 1833 the season of the year determined the matter, as books were to be accessible from ten to three, and "from 4 P.M. to sunset." For the first half of the sojourn in Chambers street, the building was unlocked at nine for "the whole of the remainder of every day except Sundays and a few Holy-Days." Under the revised by-laws of 1838, the time was established at the ample extent of from 8 A.M. until sunset, daily, except Sundays and holidays, throughout the year. Still greater latitude was shown in a resolve to keep the reading room open until 10 P.M., on and after November 30, 1840, gas having been introduced below Canal street in 1825. According to an advertisement in the *Post*, in January, 1849, books could be taken out "from 8 o'clock A.M. till sundown"; while the reading room was "open from 8 o'clock A.M. till 10 P.M."

Likewise the hour for Trustee meetings was shifted about somewhat, to suit the varying convenience of members. For nearly ten years, after November, 1823, they assembled at half-past four on the first Wednesday afternoon of May, August, November, February and April, save that in 1825 the stated May meeting was changed to the first Friday. In April, 1833, the specified day became the second Tuesday in all the usual months, but in February, 1837, a return was made to the former observance. As laid down in the published

by-laws of 1838,<sup>1</sup> the time was appointed to be "the first Wednesday after the fourth day of every month except August, and also, on the day next before the last Tuesday of April, in each year, at half past five o'clock in the afternoon." This rule obtained until May, 1848, when the board voted to meet, until December, at "half past six o'clock in the afternoon." Finally, in November, 1851, this last-named hour was ordained for all stated meetings.

While it frequently happened, as has been more than intimated in the newspaper extracts above quoted, that the board failed of a quorum, there yet appears but a solitary occasion on which not a single Trustee attended. This was in August, 1832, when "no members appeared, owing to the prevalence of the Cholera"; and the clerk logically concludes, with a spice of grim humor: "An adjournment of necessity took place."

The annual meeting of the corporation was regularly held on the last Tuesday of April, in accordance with the charter provision that has been scrupulously observed throughout the history of the Library. The Trustees' minutes contain the record of its proceedings, year after year, up to 1856. Usually little was done save to appoint a chairman and a secretary, and, on the conclusion of the voting, to listen to the result of the election from inspectors, previously named by the Trustees. The attendance is never entered and doubtless was small, as to-day, unless in case of a contested ticket. From January, 1813, to April, 1838, the meeting was called to order at noon, while the poll was kept open from 1 to 2 P.M.; at the latter date the polling time was extended to four o'clock; though within a year it was

<sup>1</sup> See Catalogue of 1838, p. xxi.

established by the new by-laws to read from one to four, a custom observed with but slight variation until 1856.

In the next place, what of the accessions to the Library's shelves within the term of years now under examination? The chief fault found with the management had been over the slow increase observable in the collection. The first pamphlet sarcastically exclaims: "In 1813 the Trustees estimated the Library to contain between 12,000 and 13,000 volumes, so that for the last 20 years, the Library has increased at the prodigious rate of 250 volumes annually." In a footnote lurks a sneer in the remark, "that nearly 1000 volumes have been presented."

To this the Trustees made answer that the rate had been 425 rather than 250 volumes a year, the collection at present numbering fully 21,000 volumes instead of 18,000, as their accusers had asserted. Certainly those most closely concerned should know best; and the minutes tend to support the Trustees, for the Library Committee had reported in December, 1832, that the books were "stated by the Librarian to amount to 20,000."<sup>1</sup>

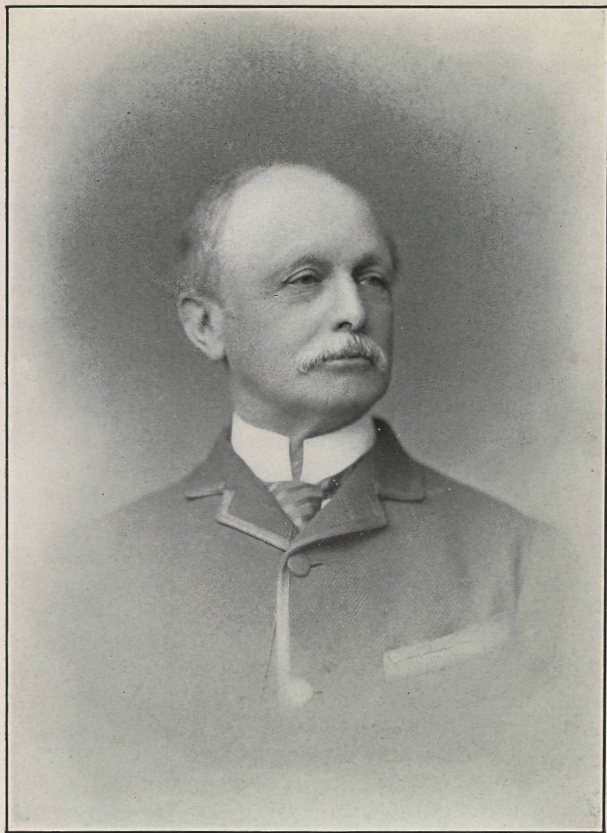
Giant strides, comparatively speaking, were taken under the impetus of the successful sale of the old building. A committee of investigation announced impressively in June, 1837: "The Library consists of about 25,000 volumes, a great number of which are very costly, and very many of the works are curious and rare." This same estimate is given also in the preface to the Catalogue of 1838.<sup>2</sup>

In the struggle for a bare existence, and under the

<sup>1</sup>This number is given also in the sketch of the Library in *New-York As It is, In 1833*, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>The number is stated as 30,000 volumes in *New-York As It Is, In 1839*, p. 68.





Charles Edward Strong

Trustee, 1855-1897. Treasurer, 1855-1859. Chairman, 1883-1885



burden of outside dissatisfaction, the board found little time or thought, not to say funds, to bestow upon the subject of a new catalogue, for a number of years after the publication of the Supplement of 1825. Finally, in June, 1837, the Library Committee was authorized "to print a catalogue." On learning, however, that the probable expense, "from 8 to \$900," would prove embarrassing at that juncture,—“the demand for catalogues having never been considerable, and a large part of the old impression still remaining on hand in sheets,”—it was suggested that “a written copy of the Catalogue as lately corrected should be made in a large folio volume, strongly bound and laid on the Library table, to be consulted by the subscribers when required,” the board voting merely that “the printing of the proposed Catalogue be suspended.”

The next word on the subject came in February, 1838, when Mr. Evertson promised the immediate completion of a catalogue “at no expense to the Library, having been voluntarily subscribed for at \$2 per copy.” He added that “the risk and burthen of the publication” had been assumed solely by the Librarian, to whom thanks were due for this saving of several hundred dollars. In December following, Mr. Forbes announced an edition of 500 copies, at a total personal cost of \$624.23. After having sold just about enough catalogues to cover the expense, he was, in January, 1839, ordered paid \$300 for the remainder, in consideration of his “more than a year of industrious occupation.” Should the Trustees, however, succeed in disposing of 150 copies at the regular price, this resolution loses something of its generous look. But with over 300 already in the hands of readers, such a probability was at least



remote. Still, the Treasurer's reports show that every little while one was sold at the stipulated price.

This Catalogue of 1838,<sup>1</sup> an octavo volume of about 350 pages, tastefully bound in cloth, must have commended itself as a model in library science for its day and generation. It met with flattering press notices and is well worthy of a brief consideration, at least.

About twenty introductory pages are devoted to miscellaneous matters of interest, comprising: "An Historical Notice of the Library," the first really authoritative sketch of the institution, and which, though but an outline, is fairly accurate as far as it goes; the "Articles of the Subscription Roll of the New-York Library, 1754"; a list of the first Trustees, 1754; the charter and subsequent amendments; the by-laws; a list of Trustees<sup>2</sup> from the foundation; the names of the Librarians<sup>3</sup>; and officers for the year 1838-1839.

The body of the text is divided into two main parts, an "Alphabetical Catalogue" and an "Analytical Catalogue," the former in coarser type covering very much more space. The production betokens infinite care and thoroughness in preparation; in comparison with the last catalogues, of 1813 and 1825, the greatest gain is the introduction of the "alphabetical" scheme. Its chief fault, judged by present standards, lies in the absence of any attempts at cross-references. All the time and effort spent on the "analytical" classification—which is really nothing more than a topical arrangement—might

<sup>1</sup> *Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New-York Society Library: with a Brief Historical Notice of the Institution; the Original Articles of Association, in 1754; and the Charter and By-laws of the Society.* New York: Printed by James Van Norden. 1838.

<sup>2</sup> This table is inaccurate, cumbrously arranged and somewhat misleading. A carefully prepared list will be found in the Appendix to the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> Also an imperfect list; see the Appendix.

far more profitably have been devoted to a double-entry system, of "titles" and "authors" both; or, best yet, to include "subjects," as well. But in such case we should prematurely have had the modern "dictionary" method complete, thus violating the law of progress; so it is enough to pronounce the work an excellent specimen of its stage in catalogue evolution, reflecting credit upon the institution and Librarian Forbes alike.

Preceding the "Analytical" part come two pages of a "Synopsis" of its contents, whose headings, though modeled after earlier catalogues, show a finer discrimination in arrangement, as follows:

- I THEOLOGY: sacred writings, philology and criticism; ecclesiastical history and law; natural theology and the evidences of Christianity; miscellaneous.
- II LAW: statute, common, mercantile and military.
- III SCIENCE: universal, comprising encyclopedias; mental and moral, including metaphysics, ethics and logic, and education; political, including government, national law and politics, and political economy, currency, commerce, statistics and public documents; exact, including mathematics and astronomy; natural, including natural philosophy, chemistry, natural history, and anatomy, medicine and surgery.
- IV ARTS: mathematical, covering engineering and the art of war and navigation; natural, comprising agriculture, gardening and veterinary; fine, including drawing, painting, engraving and music, and architecture, civil and naval; miscellaneous, comprising mechanical, chemical, domestic, &c.
- V BELLES LETTRES: elementary and theoretical, including dictionaries and grammars, and rhetoric, oratory, poesy, philology and criticism; proper, including: poetry and drama, English and American; ditto, foreign and translated; romance and facetiæ, English and American; ditto, foreign and translated; literary essays, letters and orations, English and American; ditto, foreign and translated; Greek and Latin classics and translations.

- VI GEOGRAPHY, TOPOGRAPHY, VOYAGES AND TRAVELS: universal, comprising gazetteers and collections; Europe; Asia and Africa; America; Australia and Polynesia.
- VII HISTORY: introductions, historical dictionaries and universal history; mythology, chronology, antiquities and heraldry; Greece and Rome; England, Scotland and Ireland; Europe; Asia and Africa; America.
- VIII BIOGRAPHY: general, and dictionaries; English, including Scottish and Irish; foreign; American.
- IX TRANSACTIONS: memoirs and transactions of literary and scientific institutions, foreign and American.
- X PERIODICAL WORKS: registers, reviews and magazines, British and foreign; ditto, American; American and foreign newspapers.
- XI POLYGRAPHY: collected works of miscellaneous writers, English and American; ditto, foreign.
- XII BIBLIOGRAPHY: comprising catalogues of books, foreign and American.
- XIII PAMPHLETS: unclassified; classified, viz., theological, political, statistical and politico-economical, on medicine and natural history, addresses and orations, poetical, critical and philological, on education, historical and biographical, moral, on law and reports of trials, on slavery and Indian affairs, on prison discipline, on arts and internal improvement, miscellaneous.
- XIV NOVELS.

In sharp contrast to some of the other headings, especially those of the collection in 1825, this summary shows but a slight increase in the list of novels. Its total of 724 titles marks a gain of only 155 over the enumeration made thirteen years before,—a circumstance which may explain in part the lamented public indifference to the Library's advantages.

As before, the custom was observed of attaching to presentation works the names of donors, including authors, translators, editors and publishers, together



with stanch friends of the institution, whom it would be invidious to single out from scores of benefactors. Some gifts are acknowledged in the minutes, notably in July, 1834, when, "a donation of valuable records having been received from the British Government," the Secretary was directed to thank "the British Record Commission for their munificent donation." This collection comprised printed acts of both English and Scotch parliaments and other government publications, such as excerpts from the "Rolls" series (in Latin), a "General Introduction to Domesday Book," calendars of proceedings of various courts, etc.<sup>1</sup> Again, in January, 1835, "an ancient Book of Maps," declared by the donors "worth being preserved," was received from Messrs. E. and G. W. Blunt.

In 1848 the Library became the owner of what is to-day one of its most valued and unique treasures, an ancient engraving, styled "A South Prospect of y<sup>e</sup> Flourishing City of New York in the Province of New York in America," published in London, in 1746, by Thomas Bakewell, and "most Humbly" dedicated to "His Excellency GEORGE CLINTON Esq<sup>r</sup>: Captain General & Governor in Chief of y<sup>e</sup> Province of New York & Territories thereon dependent in America." This rare old print, six and a half feet long by twenty-eight inches in width, and said to be duplicated only by copies owned by the New York Historical Society and the British Museum, was the gift of Mrs. Maria Peebles of Lansingburgh. In June, 1850, it was voted, at the suggestion of former Trustee William H. Harison, to present to

<sup>1</sup>This gift is thus noticed in the "Circular" issued by protesting shareholders in April, 1835 (see p. 375): "A valuable present has been

made to the Institution by the British Government, but it cannot be supposed that the Trustees take any credit . . . for the acquisition."

*Presented to the New-York Socy  
Library June 6 - 1838 by*

ARTICLES  
*Henry Nicoll*  
OF THE

UNION LIBRARY SOCIETY

OF

NEW-YORK.

Published the Third Day of DECEMBER, One  
Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-One.



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Printed by S. INSLEE, and A. CAR, at the New  
Printing-Office, on BEEKMAN'S-SLIP.

M,DCC,LXXI.

A unique specimen of colonial printing (facsimile size). See p. 112n.

the donor "a print<sup>1</sup> from an old Map of the City of New York with a suitable memorandum on the back of the frame." The original picture was skilfully "restored" in 1903, at the studio of H. A. Hammond Smith in Tenth street, and to-day, sealed under glass, figures conspicuously in the adornment of the main hall.

It is now seasonable to return to the long-deferred preparations for a new building. Amid all the distractions of these trying years, the friends of the Library had kept before them a vision of the new home, finished and in order, as a veritable beacon flame of hope.

As already stated, the Society Library had acquired from the Athenæum, by deed of transfer, signed May 16, 1838, its portion of the premises on the corner of Broadway and Leonard street. It will also be recalled that this agreement was the initial act of the Trustees chosen at the fiercely contested election of 1838.<sup>2</sup> Closely allied to that move, another undertaking pledged by the new board to push to completion was the erection of the contemplated building.

The work was begun with energy and despatch. On May 26th the Trustees unanimously adopted a report of the committee in charge, consisting of A. Robertson Rodgers, chairman, Professor Moore, Judge Inglis and Messrs. G. C. Verplanck and W. S. Johnson. This report, together with "accompanying plans and elevations,"—not copied in the minutes,—had been rendered three days before, "after a consultation with several gentlemen of taste and experience."

Resolutions passed August 1st authorized an edifice "of brick with brown Stone dressings," and a disposal of

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in D. T. Valentine's *Manual* for 1849.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 349-357.



the Townsend mortgage (on the old Nassau Street building), "or a loan on the pledge thereof," to raise needed funds. Finally, on November 23d, two contracts were ordered executed, the one with Frederic Diaper, architect, and the other with masons and carpenters.

At the end of the official year, in April, 1839, the committee submitted a fuller statement, announcing that \$10,000 had been spent as "the first payment due in the progress of the Work." The report closes with little purrings of satisfaction, offering in explanation a recent letter from the architect. By this it appears that the walls were then at the height of one story, that "the brick piers &c" were "ready to receive the iron columns in the lecture room," and that "the whole of the work hitherto" had been "executed in a sound, workmanlike manner, with materials of the best quality."

As no demonstration was made at the annual election in 1839,<sup>1</sup> the board went steadily on in its course, promptly reappointing the building committee. Little was reported, however, until December, when the Library Committee was "authorized to apply to Mr Verplanck to deliver an address on the removal of the Library to the new building in Broadway, and to make such other arrangements, for the same occasion, as they may deem proper." But, as in the case of the "Oration" requested of General Jacob Morton on the opening of the first building in 1795, no further allusion to any dedicatory exercises do the minutes vouchsafe.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The successors to General Laight and Mr. Kent—Messrs. Rufus L. Lord and Henry Brevoort, Jr.—were proposed by the board and were hence in sympathy with current policies.

<sup>2</sup> The corner-stone was laid Sept.

19, 1838, according to memoranda deposited therein by the Librarian, Philip Forbes. The box with its charred contents came to light in 1867, when the building, then owned by the Appleton Publishing Co., was demolished in consequence of fire.

Instead, to the great concern of the friends of the Library, a serious set-back was met with in a fire in January, 1840, just as the structure was nearing completion. A letter from the architect estimated the damage at \$1726, chiefly to floors and plastering, in consequence of which he predicted a delay of from six to eight weeks. Early in March, however, repairs had so advanced that a formal visit of inspection was paid by several of the board, Messrs. Bancker, Brevoort, Harison, Lawrence, Rodgers and Seymour, the records being mute as to their impressions.

The long-anticipated occupation of the new abode would seem nigh at hand from a resolution of March 17th, directing the removal of the collection to the building, and closing the institution for the interim. Nevertheless, one more election took place in the dismantled Mechanics' Society building at 12 Chambers street, where the Library had maintained an indifferent existence for a little over four years. That the migration had then begun is evident from an editorial notice in the *American* for April 30, 1840, which, in mentioning the removal as taking place, lets fall a few words of descriptive interest. "The rooms," it says, "like the exterior, are chaste in style, spacious in extent, and . . . [the building] now embraces a reading-room and a lecture-room."

On May 13, 1840, the first meeting of the Trustees was held amid the fresh surroundings, and was duly signalized in the minutes as convened "pursuant to notice at the New Library Building corner of Broadway

The Messrs. Appleton courteously sent to the Library the few remaining articles, including water-soaked

and scorched newspapers of the day, a copy of the Catalogue of 1838 and some personal notes of Mr. Forbes.

and Leonard Street." That friends of the Library were not alone in their satisfaction over the finished product of patient and careful planning is amply vouched for in journals and manuals of the day, as well as by many a word in personal reminiscence of its dignified and impressive appearance. One or two such appreciative extracts will be of interest. For example, Ruggles' "Picture of New York in 1846" says the Society Library was "a conspicuous and beautiful edifice, of the Ionic order, of brown freestone," and declares its apartments "unsurpassed for architectural beauty by any in the United States." Equally enthusiastic in its praise is the verdict of "New-York: Past, Present, and Future"<sup>1</sup>:

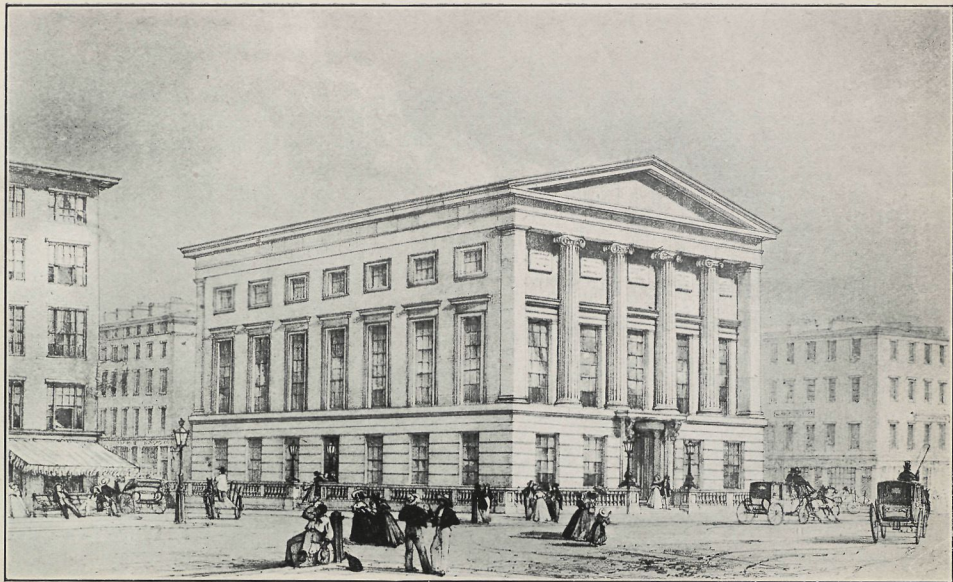
This building, 100 feet long by 60 wide, is constructed of finely-cut brown sand stone, and presents on Broadway a chaste façade of Ionic columns. On passing the structure, the eye is arrested by its bold and massive front, while the beauty of its proportions, and its highly finished masonry, elicit the approbation of good taste and critical observation.

For a sympathetic description of the interior of the building, the following extract from the *New Yorker* of November 28, 1840, will prove illuminating:

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY has lately been re-opened in its new and beautiful edifice . . . a new ornament of our principal avenue. The basement floor is divided into stores and offices. A spacious hall occupies the middle of the building. The visitor enters this and ascends a broad flight of stairs, which leads to the reading room in the rear. This is a lofty and well proportioned apartment, with windows at each end, and in it are four commodious tables covered with rich food for the literary appetite. One contains the city journals; another

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1849 by E. Porter Belden, M.A., projector of the famous "Model" of the city.





Second Building of the New York Society Library, 1840-1853

Broadway, Leonard Street and Catherine Lane  
Site of present New York Life Insurance Company Building

COLUMBIA  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY



those from different parts of the United States; and the other two are loaded with English and American periodicals—weekly, monthly and quarterly; literary, scientific, religious and political. This room, brilliantly lighted at night, with its soft carpets deadening the sound of footsteps, its cushioned arm chairs, and its rich supplies of periodicals, renewed by every steamship, forms the perfection of literary luxury. From a landing place upon the grand staircase two flights turn and ascend to the book room, which is a spacious apartment in the front of the building, with two rows of columns dividing it, and formed into alcoves by the cases which contain the books, arranged in double ranks. The librarian's desk faces the entrance. Connecting the reading room and the book room are two smaller apartments, used as conversation parlors, to avoid disturbing the readers, as committee rooms, and as studies for those authors who desire to pursue their investigations with their authorities around them, or who wish to make new books on old Burton's recipe, "as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring out of one vessel into another." A lecture room, arranged on the commodious plan of ascending and circular seats, is situated in the rear of the basement, and the upper stories are occupied by the National Academy of Design.

Next in importance to a safe anchorage in the desired haven is knowledge of what it cost to reach that happy state. An inventory, published two years later, gives the entire expense of lots, building and furnishings as \$121,313.42.<sup>1</sup> From these figures and accompanying tables, it is apparent that the board had become involved considerably in excess of even the predictions of members opposing absorption of the Athenæum in 1838.

Early efforts of the first board in the new building resulted in a legislative enactment of March, 1841, so

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Board of Trustees of the New-York Society Library*, April 22, 1842. A copy of this pamphlet is in the Library,

bound with *Annual Reports: 1875-1892*. An unbound copy is in the Library of the N. Y. Historical Society.



amending the charter of the Society Library that henceforth its shareholders were to elect, "on the last Tuesday in April in each and every year," fifteen Trustees instead of twelve. Further provisions of the act altered the quorum from seven to eight, and confirmed the accepted "mode of filling vacancies and all other matters in relation to the election and term of office of the said Trustees." Accordingly the first election in the new building was for fifteen Trustees. The former board was returned in its entirety, with the addition of Augustus Fleming, Joshua Coit and the Rev. Benjamin I. Haight. Practice soon demonstrated the wisdom of this change, the chances being thus more favorable to obtaining a quorum.

This same first twelvemonth in the Broadway building was also the banner year for new subscriptions, 150 additional shares then being purchased. The enrolment comprised 480, it will be recalled, at the time of the Athenæum merger. The 316 shares taken out under its terms, together with sixty-eight besides, raised the number to 864 in 1839. When the new building was opened in 1840, the membership was 897; a year later it had risen to 1047; and in May, 1842, it had reached 1120, the highest point hitherto, and indeed for some time to come.

It must be understood that these figures do not represent the actual number of share *holders*, for of course there were, as always, many instances of the ownership of two or more rights by the same person. For example, the 480 shares held prior to absorbing the Athenæum were owned by 420 individuals; the 316 shares then added were the property of only 190 persons, of whom "about twenty-five" were already possessed of Library

stock. Consequently the nearly 800 shares combined were divided among less than 600 different people.

The ruling that a person was not entitled to the privileges of membership until his admission should be ratified by the board—even though he had paid the price and had received his certificate—was adhered to rigidly. This practice was loudly denounced at the time of the preëlection agitation in 1833, as giving the Trustees the opportunity—of which they were accused of availing themselves—to postpone such ratification until after the election.

No list of shareholders was published between 1813 and 1856, so one must depend for information upon the Treasurer's books and the entries of names in the minutes. It is to be regretted that a careful record has not been kept of the issuance and disposition, of the transfers and present ownership of each share or right in the Library, as has so scrupulously been done by some institutions—the Boston Athenæum, for instance; but it must be borne in mind that comparatively few of the shares have been "free," while there would be little profit in keeping track of the hundreds that have been forfeited.

In the absence of such a table, therefore, and in the limited space permissible, only a few representative names may here be given, some of which are of national importance. Among such may be mentioned that noble philanthropist, Peter Cooper; Samuel Jones Tilden, a library founder himself, as well as a great political leader; George Bancroft, the historian, and Daniel E. Sickles, of Civil War fame. Exclusive of those who served as Trustees,—a list of whom will appear in full in the appendix,—there might be named William A.

Duer, president of Columbia College, the Hon. Benjamin D. Silliman, Nestor of the New York bar, Francis Marbury, the Hon. Joshua Marsden Van Cott, Thomas R. Mercein, John C. Hewitt and Cornelius Van Schaack Roosevelt, an eminent merchant, grandfather of President Roosevelt.

Meanwhile the shares of the founders and fathers were being handed down to succeeding generations, so that the membership roll was kept replenished with old Knickerbocker patronymics. The patrician element of the community has ever prided itself on its connection with the Society Library. For was the institution not aristocratic even in its origin? Indeed its very name has been taken to imply that it is the Library of "Society"—of "*New York Society*"!

These sentiments, though unwritten, are plainly discernible, and it is equally patent that to such a spirit of exclusiveness must be attributed in some degree the languor, approaching atrophy, into which at times the institution has lapsed. And it has had to be renewed by ingrafts of fresh material. Of the newer infusion at this time, one name may be taken to typify the by no means insignificant achievements of the country-bred in the fast-expanding metropolis. Long since, the tide of urban migration had begun, a tide that seemingly is to have no turning. The rural districts were sending—or rather were unable to hold back—their promising young men for the city to engulf.

But many were only temporarily lost to sight; they presently emerged, well on the road to success and honor. One of such was Thomas White, born in "Old" Boylston, Massachusetts, February 9, 1804. Of a notable New England ancestry, grandchild of an



orthodox Congregational clergyman and son of the local "Squire," he was reared with his nine brothers and sisters under the best traditions of that Puritan commonwealth. Though admitted to the bar, he turned his attention to business. His inherent good judgment and sagacity, together with habits of application, brought him prosperity, while his stainless integrity and unfailing devotion to the duties of Christian citizenship won for him the affectionate esteem of the community. He was active in affairs and good works till the last, dying at his Brooklyn home after only a brief illness, November 23, 1896, aged nearly ninety-three.<sup>1</sup>

Turning from the shareholding theme to a closely allied topic, we find that the Trustees, flushed with gratification over the substantial gains in membership during the first year in the Broadway building, were determined to raise the price of shares, which since May, 1824, had been \$25. The subject had already met with some attention; in December, 1837, Mr. Evertson, of the anti-Athenæum persuasion, had advocated an increase to \$50. This was too radical, of course; but the board took a *laissez-faire* attitude, deciding with Judge Inglis that any such advance was "inexpedient," at least until "a plan of building and general improvement" should be formed, with due publication to those interested. Nevertheless, that rumors of an impending change were

<sup>1</sup> Mr. White became a member of the Society Library in April, 1841, and took the highest satisfaction in the relationship for forty years, long after his removal to Brooklyn. So deeply did he feel the value and need of the Library as an educational factor, that it is not surprising to those who connect cause and effect, to learn that, after the delayed settlement of his estate, his

only daughter, Miss Salome E. White of Brooklyn, should give a Library to the town of her parents' nativity, in memory of her mother, Mrs. Harriet Sawyer White. The cornerstone of the Sawyer Memorial Library of Boylston, Mass., was laid May 30, 1904, at about the time the Society Library was celebrating its 150th anniversary.

being industriously bruited abroad is inferable from a bit of confidential advice inserted without authority in the newspapers, cautioning shareholders "against selling or transferring their shares at the present price of \$25, as they are worth much more, and a vigorous and determined effort is about to be made to raise the price of shares."<sup>1</sup>

It was in the midst of the excitement just prior to the stirring election of 1838 that the above words were printed, and very naturally, however kindly meant, they were at once made the target for a partisan discharge. Accordingly an insertion, signed "Reform," in the *Post*, April 18, 1838, declared the above notice meant

that certain people have very snug berths in a public institution, and would not have *their* good friends sell out to persons that they know not. Keep up the cost of the privilege—restrict the number of beneficiaries, instead of spreading wide the gates of knowledge. Let us stay in our places. The *Chinese* party in the board may use their efforts to raise the price of shares, but such conduct is behind the age.

And yet, at the very first meeting of the Trustees elected to office by this same contributor and his party, Mr. Lawrence proposed that, upon the opening of the new building, \$40 should be made the price of a share. No action was taken on his motion, though three years later, in February, 1841, the board voted to set the price at that figure; but in March they reconsidered, decreeing the admission fee to be \$33 after May 1st. The time was later extended till June 10th, probably to attract fresh subscriptions at the lower rate. For one year only

<sup>1</sup> From the *American*, April 19–20, 1838, and also the *Morning Courier* and *New-York Enquirer*, April 17–19, 1838.

was this rule in force, when a return was made to \$25, "the experience of past years" having shown that to be "the highest price that can be readily obtained."

Even with this last change in view, there was little encouragement that it would secure the desired result. So recourse was again had to the one remaining expedient, legislative permission to raise the annual payment charge. Accordingly, as in 1802 and 1819, the prescribed form of application was followed, and in March, 1842, the state legislature passed an act, empowering the Trustees "to demand and receive" six dollars instead of four "on the first Tuesday of every May hereafter," with the "same powers and remedies for the collection of the said additional sum." Agreeably to the terms of this law it was formally so voted by the board, on April 26th, with a corollary calling for the yearly payment of two dollars "on each right or share now free of all annual dues."

It will thus be noted that the charter was altered three times in as many years. The board stated in justification of this last amendment, "that it would be better to have a permanent and steady fund to rely upon, than to resort to a system of occasional loans, which would render a heavier accumulated taxation finally necessary."<sup>1</sup>

As will presently be observed, however, this measure was equally fruitless, to say nothing of the storm of protest evoked from shareholders, particularly those who had just had their yearly dues commuted by the cash payment of \$67, not to mention numbers of Athenæum members.<sup>2</sup> In consequence there ensued, to a far

<sup>1</sup> From the *Report of the Board of Trustees*, published in April, 1842. See p. 401n.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 359.



greater extent than before, transfers<sup>1</sup> of shares, "presumed to be sold at a reduced rate"; while arrearages were allowed to accumulate on others, until inevitable forfeitures resulted. Among those whose membership thus lapsed during the '30's, appears a name of romantic interest, Madam Eliza Jumel, the widow of Aaron Burr and long the owner of the stately, historic Roger Morris mansion,—now known as Washington's Headquarters,—that still dominates the valley of the Harlem.

On the subject of forfeited shares it was ordained in May, 1838, that they might be redeemed on the payment of \$20, with the return of the "previous right." Furthermore, such shares might be reissued to "heirs or assigns," as well. All three varieties of renewals are found recorded in the proceedings and ledgers.

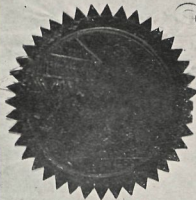
So prone were members to falling behind, that in April, 1840, the board resolved upon a strict enforcement of the by-law withholding all privileges from those in arrear until payment, and that rights on which sixteen dollars—or four years' dues—were owing should be declared forfeit. Instances also occurred of the annulment of membership for failure to pay the one-dollar "initiation fee."

For the short time in which \$33 was the price of a share, 1841, the figure at which one might be redeemed was set at \$25. In February, 1849, it was voted that holders of forfeited rights could be restored to full standing on paying the arrears, or \$15 "for each share within six months." As a further incentive to such resumption it was at the same time decided to levy no annual charge on any such, prior to May, 1850.

<sup>1</sup> On Feb. 3, 1830, it had been voted to charge one dollar for a transfer, just as in the case of the issuance of a new share.

To all to whom these Presents shall come,

THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY *have granted.*



Know ye that the said Trustees  
do hereby admit *William Coventry H. Waddell* \_\_\_\_\_  
to be a MEMBER of the said Society and that he is entitled to one right  
share in the Property thereof under a special resolution,  
authorizing him to redeem the share of *John Waddell*,  
which was forfeited during the American Revolution.  
In Testimony whereof the said Trustees have caused their common Seal  
to be hereunto affixed this *Eleventh* day of *January*  
in the Year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and *forty one*.

BY ORDER OF THE TRUSTEES.

*W. A. Harrison* Treasurer.

*Wm. English* Secretary.





Occasionally an application for a gift-share was made to the Trustees, and semi-occasionally was such an application granted. In March, 1839, a letter was read from Peter A. Schermerhorn, Esq., a manager of the New York Asylum for the Blind, asking in its behalf free access to the Library. The "use of one right" was granted, the managers to be responsible for any resulting loss or injury to books. But in the following December it was voted "inexpedient"—the favorite word for adverse decision—to bestow the same privilege upon "the Teachers, Monitors & others connected with the Public School Society."

Similar action was taken at times on requests for full membership in return for other than the stipulated monetary equivalent; for example, in January, 1848, "an offer from D. I. Browne to exchange certain books for a free share in the Library was declined." Very different, however, was their procedure, in April, 1850, over the proposition of John J. Audubon, "to sell his work on the birds of America for a free share," it being voted to "pay him fifty dollars and give him certificates for two ordinary Rights." Thus the Trustees secured, at an actual outlay of only \$50,—though of course representing double that sum,<sup>1</sup>—a work which even then commanded a much higher price, and which to-day has a value of \$200, at least.

A notable departure from customs obtaining since the founding of the institution was made in December, 1840, when the board voted that "persons not members be admitted to the use of the Library (within the Building) and the Reading Room at the rate of ten dollars for one year, six dollars for six months and four dollars

<sup>1</sup> In April, 1850, the Treasurer paid \$100 for a copy of this work.

for three months, payable in advance." Previously, either there had been set terms, depending on the length of loan and the fold of the book, or else the whole subject had been left discretionary with the Library Committee. The printed by-laws of 1850, however, show a return to the latter practice, though there is no evidence to prove any variation in the rates charged to temporary subscribers from 1840 to the present time.<sup>1</sup>

Excluding such persons, there may be summarized three classes of proprietors, as follows: 1st, those paying \$6 a year on each share; 2d, holders of commuted shares, paying \$2 annually; and 3d, owners of "Athenæum" shares, also assessed \$2 a year. The actual amounts, which, at the prevailing seven per cent. rate, would yield interest equal to the assessments of \$6 and \$2, were, respectively, \$87 and \$29; but, inasmuch as the sum of \$67—established in March, 1839,<sup>2</sup> as the amount for commuting the annual payment of \$4—was somewhat in excess of the sum necessary to produce that interest, and "as an inducement to members to commute," these figures were, in June, 1842, reduced to \$75 and \$25, respectively.

Meanwhile, in September, 1841, there had been published a supplementary catalogue, a slender octavo volume of about sixty pages, containing titles of about 3411 volumes.<sup>3</sup> It is uniform in typography and "arrangement" with the Catalogue of 1838,—that work having been found "practically useful," it is stated in the preface or "Remarks." An edition of 1000 was

<sup>1</sup> In January, 1849, John W. Leigh, who had just paid \$10 for a year's subscription, on leaving town asked for a return of his fee. It was voted, not unfairly, to refund \$6 on his surrendering his "ticket."

<sup>2</sup> See p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> *Supplementary Catalogue of The New-York Society Library.* New York, J. Van Norden & Co., Printers, 1841.

ordered, the price charged to purchasers being fifty cents a copy. The board assumed the whole expense of the publication—\$182.34.

Again, in May, 1843, there was issued a second supplement, although no copy can now be found in any

## NEW-YORK LIBRARY.

**T**HIS is to give notice, that the worshipful corporation of the city of New-York, have committed the care of their Library, of near 2000 volumes, (among which are a great many very valuable antient, curious, and rare books,) to Mr. Jackson, Master of the Academy in the Exchange, who will soon publish a catalogue, with the conditions of lending them out. The trustees of the Society-Library have also appointed him keeper of their Library, consisting of a large well chosen collection of the most useful modern books, with a considerable late addition, of which a catalogue will be speedily published, that the subscribers may stich in with their former catalogues. A share in this Library is now worth 10 l. 10 s. and is transferable by the subscribers.

Both Libraries are kept in a large commodious room, fitted up for the purpose, at the City-Hall, where constant attendance will be given on Mondays and Thursdays, from half past eleven to one o'clock.

As a sense of the universal benefit of good reading, and of the great want of opportunity of having that otherwise supplied, in this place, has prompted the corporation, and the gentlemen of the Society, to take this method for encouraging it; it is hoped great numbers will improve this advantage, which it is not doubted, Mr. Jackson will exert himself all he can to promote, at the fixed hours of attendance; and also will assist, particularly young gentlemen, at such other convenient hours, as upon application to him, they and he shall agree upon.

Those who have borrowed, or have any books from the Corporation-Library, are desired to return them; and those who have any of the following books, now missing out of the Society-Library, are desired also to return the same to the librarian.

### *Books missing out of the Society-Library.*

Ludlow's memoirs, fol. Wood's institutes of common law, fol. Hogarth's analysis, 4to. Cowley's works, vol. 1st. Shakespear, vol. 2d. Roll of the late war, vol. 4th. Clogher's journal. Life of Richelieu, 2 vols. De la Sale's voyages. Henepin's travels. Life of Sir Matthew Hale, 12mo. Life of the duke of Marlborough. Thompson's travels. Voyage to Peru. Christian hero. Conclusion of bishop Burnet's history. Adventurer, vol. 4th. Select trials at the Old Bailey, vol. 3d. Rowe's works, vol. 2d.

"Good reading enriches the minds of youth, and forms them to just thinking; amuses old age, graces prosperity, and relieves and comforts in adversity, it affords agreeable entertainment at home, incumbers not, but recommends abroad; is always a cheerful companion in the city, in the country, and in travelling, wherever one is, alone or in company."

CICERO.



institutional Library of the city. Inasmuch as the Treasurer's books show that only \$29.25 was devoted to the purpose, it must have been a limited edition. According to the Librarian's memorandum in April, 1848, it contained titles of 737 additional volumes.

In February, 1845, there came a long report from Messrs. Verplanck, Cogswell, Ogden, Minturn, Williams, Rodgers and Inglis, appointed the December before to suggest a plan whereby the Library might "be brought more prominently before the public and its usefulness be extended by an increase of its members and pecuniary funds." In its accompanying statement, for general distribution, the committee declared: "Our Library now contains more than 35,000 volumes, well selected and carefully condensed in number and value by the exchange of duplicates and sale of useless books."

At the same time, local papers were announcing a considerable importation of French books. The *Evening Post*, in commenting on this acquisition, February 20th, says: "We are glad to see the Library in a state of growth and prosperity. Within a year it has paid \$1000 of its debt, besides increasing its collection of books by nearly 2000 volumes, which we are informed by the Librarian is twice as many as were ever added in one year." Alluding to the fact that the Society Library was "our only public institution of the kind," which should, with proper public spirit, "ere this have been the finest public collection of books in the United States," the editor nevertheless concludes: "As it is, it offers a basis on which a little well-applied munificence might build up a noble library. The number of volumes it contains is about 40,000, and there is very little trash among them."

But in April, 1848, Messrs. Titus, Coit, De Peyster, Cogswell and Leupp, specially deputed "to ascertain the number of volumes now in the actual possession of the Library," reported at great length their painstaking, precise count of the books. As a result they were "not prepared to give any opinion as to the number of volumes which may have been lost, nor how far the value of particular works may have been impaired by such loss." Expressing full concurrence in the lately rendered opinion of another select committee, that there was urgent need "of adopting some plan which, avoiding unnecessary trouble or expense," might "provide a mode of ascertaining with certainty whether books taken from the Library" had been lost or not, these gentlemen announced that the institution had then "in its actual possession 30,635 volumes," of which there were "packed away in store room, being mostly duplicates, odd volumes, old files, &c, &c, 3465."

In December, 1848, a committee was charged with "the expediency and best mode of publishing a new catalogue." After several oral reports, in February, 1849, the sum of \$900 was voted for its preparation and issuance. At a November meeting this appropriation was raised to \$1200, on the Librarian's assurance that the work would "be ready for the press before the end of the year"; nevertheless, May came again before printing was begun. According to the Treasurer's records the printer was paid \$1148; so, with the expense of binding, the appropriation must have been somewhat overdrawn. By October, 1850, Mr. Forbes reported that the stipulated edition of 1000 copies had been taken to the binders, three months before, and that he had paid on them an insurance premium of \$10.50. From the

Treasurer's accounts it appears that they were sold at rates varying from \$2.50 to \$1.50, presumably according to binding, for the first hundred copies were ordered "in a suitable style to the pattern of Bossange's Paris Catalogue." By April, 1851, over \$400 had been realized on their sale.

This Catalogue of 1850,<sup>1</sup> the last and most elaborate published by the Society Library, was again the product of the industry and intelligence of Librarian Philip Forbes, assisted by Dr. H. D. Neal. Of octavo-fold like its predecessors, it is a much larger volume than any of them, containing about 670 pages. Its excellencies, from the point of view of the printer, the book-maker or the modern scientific cataloguer, will not be detailed here. In fine, with its wide margins, "double-leaded" clear type, good quality of paper and serviceable binding, the book presents to-day, to the layman at least, a most attractive appearance, and certainly must have been regarded, when issued, as a handsome addition to any library.

In plan it follows closely the Catalogue of 1838; there is no foreword, but the table of contents is like the latter's, with additions. The first topic as before is the "Historical Notice"; though somewhat altered in phraseology, it shows no further research beyond claiming in the opening sentence, that "The history of the New York Society Library commences in the year 1700,"<sup>2</sup>—the first appearance of this oft-quoted assertion and fond belief.

<sup>1</sup> *Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New York Society Library, with the Charter, By-laws, &c., of the Institution.* New York: R. Craighead, printer, 112 Fulton street. 1850.

<sup>2</sup> For the source of this statement and for full treatment of the subject, see the introductory chapter, "The Library in Colonial New York."



The sketch is brought up to date and announces, with reference to the size of the collection, that "the present number amounts to 35,000 volumes." In recording the bequest of Miss Elizabeth Demilt, the hope is expressed that her example "may prove an incentive to the liberality of others," and "may induce our richer citizens to spare a portion of their wealth thus to erect to their memories monuments the most useful, the most honorable, the most durable." Worthy of quoting in full is the closing paragraph:

It will thus be seen that while the number of its supporters has remained almost stationary in the midst of an unparalleled growth of population, the Society Library has continued to increase and to extend its resources for usefulness. It has erected two large and conspicuous public edifices, ornamental to the city; and in redeeming the city from the imputation of indifference to such institutions, it has surmounted every obstacle connected with its great outlays for building, and by strict economy has been enabled largely to increase its supplies of valuable books, of which the volume now offered will, it is hoped, afford satisfactory evidence.

Then follow, as usual, the several documentary proofs of the Library's foundation and legal rights as a corporation; eight pages of by-laws; a list of the Trustees from the beginning, continued to date but repeating former errors; and the names of Librarians since 1793. The chief new features are an "Alphabetical List of Subjects Contained in the Analytical Catalogue" and the "Catalogue of the Winthrop Library." The latter in 269 titles is thus introduced: "*This Ancient and Curious Collection of Books was presented by the late FRANCIS B. WINTHROP, ESQ.; they were the property*

*of his distinguished ancestor, JOHN WINTHROP, the Founder of Connecticut."*

Philip Jones Forbes occupied the office of Librarian during this whole period and more, serving the institution, like his father before him, for a full generation. Born in New York city and beginning his connection with the Library in 1824, on that parent's decease, he truly, as he himself says,<sup>1</sup> "succeeded him in fact, tho' not officially, at his death, being still a minor." He was first appointed Librarian, it will be recalled, in May, 1828, at a salary of \$600, together with a percentage on collections of annual payments.

This stipend was continued until May, 1835, when it was raised to \$700; a year later, upon the removal to Chambers street, \$300 additional was voted for an assistant. In November, 1837, Mr. Forbes was ordered paid \$900 a year, and the assistant was awarded a "donation" of an extra \$100. The next May the board decided for the future to appoint "a clerk who shall be also collector and an assistant to the Librarian," at \$350 a year, and presently named one John W. Palmer for the position. He was further accorded a commission of five per cent. on collections of annual dues.

A very interesting, not to say extraordinary, notion of the province of a Librarian is that formulated by William S. Johnson as a proposed by-law, in February, 1840. He recommended that the post be "honorary" and "conferred on such person as in the opinion of the Board of Trustees is so accomplished in literature and science as to give dignity to the office and fill the office of literary head of the corporation." Furthermore, be-

<sup>1</sup> From notes on a sheet of foolscap, enclosed with various articles in a box under the corner-stone of the Broadway building. See p. 398n2.

sides certain perquisites, such as a room to himself, stationery, fuel and lights, all "at the expense of the corporation," he should "preside at all meetings of the Board of Trustees when present," and be ex officio a member of the Library Committee. Besides appointing and regulating the salaries of assistants, etc., this imposing personage was to "have the general supervision and superintendence of the Library and the interests of the corporation, and from time to time make such reports and suggestions to the Board," as he should "deem expedient."

Whether the holder of these advanced views had any definite person in mind answering these requirements, there is no telling! That the Trustees did not relish the idea of such a dictatorship, however, is plain from their promptly voting the measure "inexpedient, inasmuch as it is believed to be impossible to find a gentleman of the proper qualifications and character who would bestow an adequate degree of attention on the duties of the Library, rendering it necessary to employ as great a number of persons, and of the same qualifications, as on the old plan." The majority opinion—if not unanimous, for by that time Mr. Johnson had retired—took shape, however, in June, 1840, in the passage of a by-law investing the Library Committee "with all the powers and duties of *head Librarian*, subject to the control and directions of the Board." This provision was still in force in 1850; and, though not so expressed in the carefully revised by-laws of 1856, its spirit is plainly discernible in that committee's dealings with successive Librarians.

In May, 1843, the salaries were set at \$800 for the Librarian, \$350 for the "room keeper," A. W. Trappan,

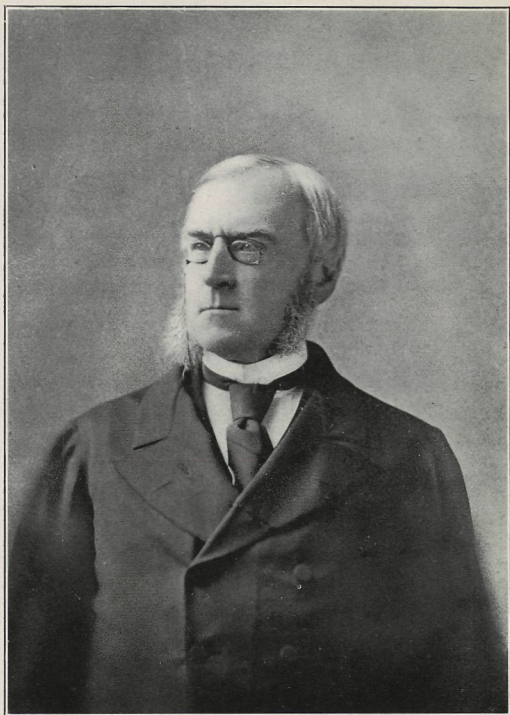


and \$250 for the janitor, George Paterson, or a reduction of \$200 in all. Three years later these items of expenditure were a little over \$1400, including "Boy (in clothing), \$28.75."

In September, 1847, the board judged it "inexpedient at the present time to make a permanent addition to the salary of the Librarian," nevertheless voting him a gratuity of \$100. A similar present was made to him in May, 1849, towards—to use his own plaintive words—"the extension of the relief required to enable him to continue the performance of his duties in the station in life in which circumstances had placed him."

At the same time, in response to his tale of hardship and embarrassments, Messrs. Delafield, Titus and Gourlie were asked to confer upon "a proper salary for a Librarian . . . and upon such other matters connected with the office," as should seem "expedient." Within a month they reported, in part as follows: that he was entitled to \$1000 a year, because his whole time was required; but that, even "when the debt should be paid," it would "probably be more advisable to employ assistants at liberal salaries than to raise the salary of the principal." Otherwise "the alternative would be to suggest that the Librarian be at liberty, at a convenient time, and when he finds it to his advantage, to seek some more profitable employment." Such a course the Trustees "could not in justice oppose," for Mr. Forbes's "long and faithful services" gave him "strong claims" to consideration.

As to the fact "that some of the shareholders were dissatisfied with the Librarian," together with "vague complaints" at his "want of courtesy and alleged disre-



Robert Lenox Kennedy

Trustee, 1856-1887. Chairman, 1882-1883. Benefactor, 1878





spect" to members, it should be said in fairness to him that "the zeal and interest always displayed by him when the interests of the institution were to be promoted are not reconcileable with intentional offence to the shareholders." Nevertheless, the report suggested that "a conciliatory and kind manner, so far at least as to prevent injurious misconstructions, would be at once the remedy," and might be "reasonably required and easily practised." A copy of the paper, which also included a discussion of missing books, was "furnished" to the Librarian.

In April, 1852, on his asking for "desired relief," the board again voted Mr. Forbes \$100, half the sum petitioned for, his salary still being \$900. In February, 1854, it was decided "to credit him with a sum not exceeding \$200, in consideration of any reasonable claim on account of his increased expenditures or past extra services." Thus, in the centennial year of the Library, the "salaries and perquisites" amounted to something over \$1600, of which the Librarian received, including "extras," a little more than \$1000, the remainder going to subordinates.

As will be remembered, the Librarian had been given the use of certain rooms in the old Nassau Street building; also these and other chambers were from time to time rented to outsiders, chiefly lawyers, that neighborhood being then as now a rendezvous of the legal fraternity. During the stay in the Mechanics' Society quarters some little revenue was gained from the stores on Broadway, later demolished to make way for the second building.

It was during the thirteen years' occupancy of this latter edifice that the Library's exchequer drew from

the rental of extra apartments one of the main streams of its income. To summarize: there was realized for that period a total of \$42,575 from this source, or an annual average of \$3275. The first year's receipts therefrom were \$3250; the last,—1852–1853,—\$2976; the highest sum reached was \$4658.86 in 1848–1849; the lowest in 1851–1852,—\$2514.

Three items entered into the calculation, viz.: from the "stores and basement" was derived the amount of \$15,234.36, or a yearly average of \$1171.87; for the lecture room the Library received approximately \$15,261, or an average of \$1173.90, the regulation charge for its use being \$15; while the exhibition rooms on the top story brought in \$12,081.99, or at the rate of \$929.38 a year.

The stores held a more or less shifting tenantry, of more or less shifting ideas of business, not to say moral, obligation. For instance, in May, 1842, Secretary Inglis was empowered to collect the rent from one Holbrook, "by distress or otherwise and to take measures to eject him." His case is not dignified by a further mention in the minutes; but the Treasurer's report recites that in April, 1843, \$1.87½ covered the "expenses of distraining on Holbrook"; while an almost burlesque finale is put upon the episode in the terse entry, "Laborer ousting Holbrook, 25c."

That the lecture room would prove a popular feature had been anticipated long before the building was even "on paper." In it were held entertainments, discussions and assemblies of the widest variety. As a notable instance, it is told how, on February 3, 1848, Edgar Allan Poe held a select audience "entranced" for over two hours there by his brilliant lecture on "The Cosmogony

of the Universe.”<sup>1</sup> Among organized bodies that met there at one time or another may be mentioned the Mechanics’ Institute and the Society of the New Jerusalem, which latter conducted Sunday worship in the hall from 1847 to 1850.

A much more steady tenant occupied the exhibition rooms on the third floor. As far back as May, 1838, the council of the National Academy of Design had sought accommodations in the proposed structure. Possession was taken in the early summer of 1840 and was held under the terms of a ten-year lease at a rental of \$1000. Says the annalist<sup>2</sup> of that society:

The engagement was deemed extremely venturesome, extra hazardous, too high up town, too high up stairs, too everything wrong—“*risky*,” in fact. Yet it was taken. The accommodations were doubled in extent—the rent so in amount. The rooms were to be reserved in the rough and would require from four to five thousand dollars properly to finish and furnish them—which would more than exhaust the Treasury—and nothing could exceed the fears with which the proceeding was received. . . . The largest Exhibition receipts ever taken were taken in that building. The rooms were handsomely proportioned, imposing in appearance, beautifully decorated, and not difficult of access. The stairs grand and easy, and the whole building one of excellent fitness.

Another historian<sup>3</sup> of the Academy wrote years later of this sojourn: “We were at the top of the Society Library building, a long climb.” No untoward incident seems to have happened to mar the harmony of the

<sup>1</sup> George E. Woodberry. *Edgar Allan Poe*. Boston, 1885. P. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Cummings. *Historic Annals of the National Academy of Design*. Philadelphia, 1865. P. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Huntington. “The National Academy of Design” in the *Year Book of the Art Societies of New York, 1898-9*. New York, 1899. P. 17.



relations between the two institutions, even when misfortune befell the Academy.<sup>1</sup>

In direct consequence of the revenue derived from galleries, lecture hall and stores, the Trustees, in 1851, became involved in a lawsuit with the Corporation of the city over the taxing of the Library premises. So far as the records show, there had been no thought of assessing the institution prior to May, 1838, the time when the Athenæum holdings were taken in charge; on a remonstrance from the board this imposition was promptly withdrawn. Apparently the city assessors resumed their former attitude the next year, however, for upon the minutes appears a copy of the opinion of Peter A. Cowdrey, "Counsellor for the Corporation," relative to such a levy, dated November 9, 1839. His finding is wholly favorable to the Library, as follows:

In brief, he declares the property of the institution "not legally subject to taxation," as being denominated "a *public* Library," both in the charter and in its legislative confirmation of 1789. The objection to its being so considered arose from "its being divided into shares and being thus the property of individuals." For an institution to be included under the act of exemption, it

<sup>1</sup> Early in January, 1850, Secretary J. H. Shegogue of the latter society advised the Trustees of the Library that the receipts of the late exhibition had been insufficient to meet current expenses, let alone to pay the rent, of which \$750 would shortly be due. On February 6th the board adopted a committee's recommendation to accept from the Academy a bond for \$2000, secured by a mortgage on certain statues and books. The sum of \$250 was to be paid every six months, beginning on May 1st thereafter, as also "interest on each quarter's rent from the day on

which the same became payable." A "schedule" was enclosed, enumerating nine pieces of statuary (the freight on which it was claimed cost \$2500!), which were accepted as collateral security,—in preference to \$1500 worth of Academy stock,—together with some seventeen standard works on the literature of art, at the same valuation. The Treasurer's records show, however, that a surprisingly early settlement was made on June 15th following, at which time the Academy of Design had removed to its new building further up Broadway.

"must have something of a *public* character," that is, "common to many." Public Libraries, by their very terms of incorporation, are styled "*social* and *public*," and are "to be formed by *private* subscription and to be divided into shares, assignable as the property of the individual owner." Such are all colleges, seminaries of learning, schools and churches, being wholly "of the same character in point of public usefulness with the Library in question."

The subject was again agitated in March, 1849, though a petition from the Treasurer and Secretary to the city board of supervisors, "praying a discharge from such tax," was evidently granted. The matter took a more serious form when, in February, 1851, Treasurer Rodgers was empowered to conduct legal proceedings against the city's claim to tax "the real and personal property of this corporation." On April 28th, he reported the suit begun, and that a temporary injunction had been issued to restrain a collection of the assessment.

While the question was hanging fire in the courts, there came the sale of the Broadway premises to Mr. Samuel F. Appleton, acting for the firm of Messrs. D. Appleton & Co., publishers. Under the terms of settlement, executed April 29, 1853, a bond and mortgage of \$5000 was given the purchaser, payable only in case of remission by the city authorities of the averred tax arrears, less "any redemption thereof on account of sales for taxes."

When at last the courts were heard from, in January, 1854, the decision proved disappointing. Judge Emmet at the special term of the superior court ruled adversely, "on the ground that the Library had not pursued the proper remedy." Nevertheless, encouragement

was found in the court's expressed belief, "that this institution was a Public Library." Thereupon the same officers were empowered to petition the city fathers again, or to appeal the case, as they should see fit. For some time there is no further mention of the subject, save that in April, 1854, the Treasurer was authorized to redeem any property "sold or liable for taxes."

Immediately after the regeneration of 1855, however, a special committee, Messrs. Van Schaick, W. H. Anthon and Le Roy, took the subject up in earnest. In July a petition was presented to the Corporation of the city, asserting that the New York Society Library should be exempt from taxation under the statute of 1823, expressly exempting "the real and personal property of every public library." This paper rehearsed the facts of the case, laying stress on the opinion of former Corporation Counsel Cowdrey and on the *obiter dictum* of Justice Emmet. It also adverted feelingly to the close connection between the Society Library and the long-defunct Corporation Library, prior to the Revolution.

At the request of the board of councilmen, the counsel to the Corporation, Robert J. Dillon, took the matter under advisement. He delivered in January, 1856, an elaborate opinion,<sup>1</sup> upholding the contentions of the Trustees. The term "Public Library," he says, as used in the statute of 1823, "relative to taxation," could not mean state or municipal libraries, "because public property is never taxed." The fact that the privileges of the Society Library were subject to certain yearly charges did not alter its public character, as they were "not imposed as a source of gain or profit," being "no more than

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Board of Councilmen.* New York, 1856. Vol. LXI, pp. 702-704.



sufficient to defray the necessary expenses of keeping, preserving and supplying the Library." Though, as a corporation, it was private, "in its uses and its objects it is public," just like railway companies, "which are of such a public character that the legislature may delegate to them the right of eminent domain." Furthermore, all Public Libraries, incorporated under the act of 1796, "possess every feature which makes the Society Library a private corporation." In conclusion, therefore, his opinion is that the assessments were illegal, and that the Trustees, "having presented their [former] petition in time [*i.e.*, within six months after confirmation by the board of supervisors]," should not "incur any prejudice" in their just demand for restitution.

Impressed by this unequivocal judgment, the committee on finance of the board of councilmen, comprising Messrs. George A. Barney, Charles Whitlock, J. W. T. Van Riper and Otis D. Swan (then in the first year of his trusteeship in the Library), recommended that the petition be granted, both as to remitting the taxes formerly levied, and as to authorizing the comptroller to "draw his warrant in favor of the Library" for the sums paid by Mr. Appleton to redeem the premises in 1849 and 1850, together with proper interest money. Their finding was approved in June,<sup>1</sup> subject to ratification by the board of aldermen; but in that body it met with unforeseen opposition, and, after several votes and further conferences, failed of adoption by a vote of ten to eight.<sup>2</sup> The chief objections were that the institution had drawn a revenue from the stores, lecture hall and exhibition rooms in the Broadway building, and that,

<sup>1</sup>*Proceedings of the Board of Councilmen*, 1856. Vol. LXII, p. 908.

<sup>2</sup>*Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen*, 1856. Vol. LXII, p. 507.

despite all reasonable proof to the contrary, it "was not in the strict sense of the term a public library."

What course was now open to the Trustees? They must either pay the so-called arrears,—a refusal to do which would simply mean more redemption costs,—or else renew the litigation at a standstill since Justice Emmet's decision, over two years before. Without hesitation they determined on the latter alternative, feeling that their future interests were no less at stake. But the affair was brought to settlement much sooner than could have been anticipated. When the comptroller learned of their intention to prosecute their former suit against the city before a higher court, he at once offered to compromise the claim on the following basis: that he would accept, without interest, the original sum of \$917.04, still due, provided the Library would abandon its efforts to have the taxes remitted.

In October the compromise was accepted, inasmuch as by the terms of Mr. Appleton's bond he had the right to pay the whole amount, about \$1600, and charge it to the Library, and as he indeed "had given notice that he would do." Thus from the \$5000-bond and mortgage the institution realized, after all payments and expenses, the sum of \$2532.78. Another good result of the agitation was that the Treasurer was able to announce that "there did not appear on the assessors' books any tax on the property of the Library" for 1856, their first year in the University Place building. And this exemption was continued, save for occasional levies for street improvements, until 1885, a discussion of which renewal belongs properly in a later chapter.

The final subject for special notice here is the financial history of the Society Library during the

quarter-century, 1829–1854. Although its consideration occupies by far the most space in the minutes and engages the attention, not to say the earnest solicitude, of the Trustees above any other topic, it will be possible to outline here only the leading features.

*The New-York Society Library*  
*To Hugh Gainie Dr*  
 For 2 sheets and half of catalogue 5:0:0  
 For Paper for 500 Copies ~ ~ ~ ~ 2:0:0  
 For folding covering and sewing }  
 also Paper for 500 Copies ~ } 3:0:0  
 For Hawkfurther Voyages - 7:0:0  
 For an Advertisement 11/12 } £ 7:0:0  
 Jan. 1773 ~ ~ ~ ~ } 0:5:0  
 £ 17:13:0

*Recd the above by*  
*Hugh Gainie*

Receipt (facsimile size) signed by Hugh Gainie. See p. 187n.

To begin with, in February, 1830, it was announced with no little satisfaction that the debt to the Bank of New York had been reduced from \$5250 to \$4290 in one year; by December, 1832, it had sunk to \$2750, their only obligation. After running for forty years, it was finally discharged in May, 1836, on the sale of the Nassau Street property.

But bright prospects then in view were soon dispelled



by heavy expenses incident to the new building, combined with assuming the Athenæum obligations, both of which plunged the institution into a much greater debt than before. Along with this came a series of unfortunate investments of Library funds by Treasurer Harison, a full account of which, together with the report of an investigating committee, was published in pamphlet form by the Trustees in April, 1842.<sup>1</sup>

No imputation "of bad faith or of seeking any personal advantage" was cast at Mr. Harison, and due credit was given him for the "great care and accuracy" his accounts had shown ever since his appointment in April, 1838. "Whatever error of judgment may have been committed," the Treasurer's integrity was unimpeachable, and it was deemed "but justice to him to add" that no member of the board had performed services of greater or more lasting value. Nevertheless, "the question of the responsibility of Mr. Harison, or of any person or persons now or heretofore connected with this Institution, for any loss to it by reason of loans heretofore made," was referred to counsel, an action approved at the annual stockholders' meeting, a few days later.

On the reorganization of the board,—to which all former members were returned, despite another contested election,<sup>2</sup>—Mr. Harison was reappointed Treasurer; but on May 16th he resigned that office and his

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Board of Trustees.* See p. 401n.

<sup>2</sup> From a communication in the *American*, April 27, 1842, it appears that 451 ballots were cast and that, "although there were two tickets voted for by their respective supporters, and although the annual meeting was long, and some difference of opinion existed as to the management of the affairs of the

Library, general harmony and good feeling prevailed." The names of Messrs. Inglis, Barclay, Minturn and Verplanck were on both lists, so they received the highest number of votes, respectively. The other candidates on the defeated ticket were William Kent, John R. Townsend, John J. Morgan and Henry Nicoll, former Trustees, and Messrs. Hugh Maxwell, — Van Beuren,

trusteeship as well. He did not claim to have "done enough," in so "painfully exerting" himself to serve the Library, but withdrew "on account of circumstances," at the same time assuring "each one and all" of his "unfeigned regard and respect."

In November, 1842, the opinion of counsel, George Wood, was rendered, namely: that the Treasurer had no authority to invest the funds of the institution, such power appertaining solely to the board in its corporate capacity; that he had not "exercised caution" or sought "the best and highest kind of security"; and that the other Trustees, not fully informed of the investments, were not responsible, for, though they had not demanded an explicit statement from the Treasurer, "they had a right to repose some confidence . . . in his known character and general deportment in office."

On the next point, "the right and expediency of effecting a compromise with Mr Harison," counsel argued that it did not "derogate from the power of the board to compromise with an officer who has been delinquent, if done fairly and with a view to the best interests of the stockholders and all concerned."

Consequently negotiations were promptly opened with the former Treasurer; but not until April, 1844, was an arrangement finally made with him. In substance this unique agreement was as follows: (1) a four-year bond of \$8000, due April 2, 1848, with interest at seven

— Butler, — Barstow, — Dillon, — Jaffray and Cornelius Matthews. The last-named was accused in an article, entitled "Puffer Hopkins and the New-York Society Library," in the *New World* of April 23d, of having drawn up the opposition ticket. Although this charge was flatly denied in the

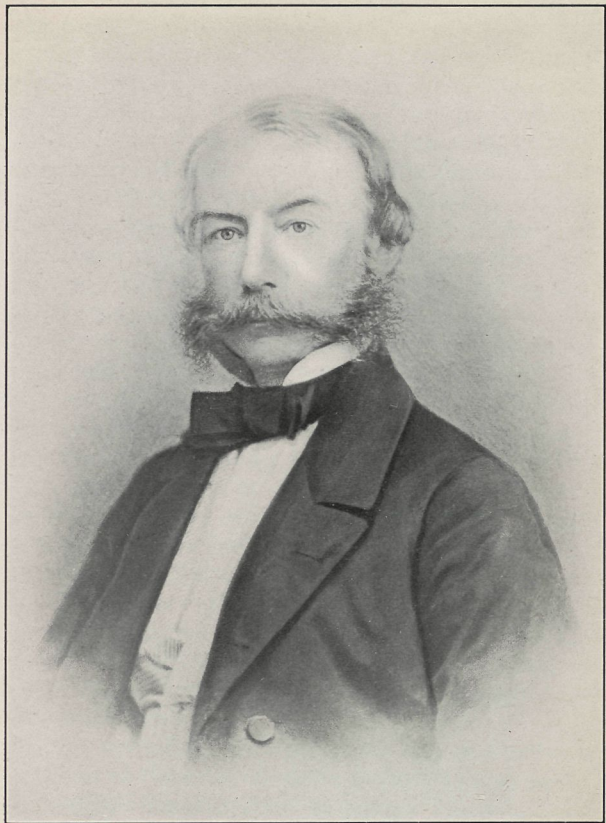
*Evening Post* of the same date, Mr. Matthews, celebrated as the author of the book, "Puffer Hopkins," received the lowest number of votes. Other articles in the *American* and the *Post* for April 23d and 25th aired the financial situation of the Library at considerable length.

per cent., payable semi-annually and secured by a mortgage on the property of the institution, was given to Mr. Harison, in exchange (2) for his delivering to the Trustees, canceled, a five-year bond of \$10,000 at the same rate, made over by him in the name of the Library, in September, 1839, to Mr. Thomas W. Ludlow, and on which no interest had ever been paid; (3) the ex-Treasurer was further awarded \$560, the equivalent of one year's interest, to cover the time elapsed since his proposal was made; and (4) two releases were executed, mutually absolving both parties from any future accountability for past transactions.

In brief, the meaning of this happily adjusted compromise was that the Library, which had lost outright the sum of \$9500, together with all accruing interest for five years, was partially compensated by having had for about that length of time the free use of \$10,000, and by the virtual restoration of \$2000 from Mr. Harison, who also became responsible for nearly \$3200 of back interest on the Ludlow bond. In return he was awarded in cash the sum of \$560; he was to receive that same amount in semi-annual payments as long as the new bond should run; and, besides the clearing of his record and his guaranteed immunity from any later claims, he was entitled to whatever revenue might arise from the seemingly worthless securities still held in his name.

At the time of this understanding the debt of the Society Library had attained to \$60,534.12, its highest figure. The next year, in consequence of the above agreement and other measures, it had fallen to \$52,000, at which level it remained for three years. In May, 1848, a special committee unanimously urged "a prompt and vigorous effort to place the Institution in a more





John Romeyn Brodhead

Trustee, 1858-1871



eligible situation as regards its annual revenues, as well as its means to reduce and extinguish the debt, that the Library may be rendered more useful as well as more popular." "A difference of opinion," however, arose "as to the means most suitably and effectually to accomplish this object." Both majority and minority reports were spread in full on the records. The former, signed by James H. Titus, Daniel Seymour and Frederic De Peyster, proposed a reduction of the cost of shares to \$12.50, and of the annual payment charge to three dollars,—just half the current prices,—with a corresponding whittling down of the commutation rates.

After showing in tabular form the steady decrease in membership, the majority were "unable to avoid the conclusion that some of the elements under which the Library exists are not propitious to its growth, and that there are causes operating, however silently and moderately, still positively, to its detriment." These causes, in their "conclusive conviction," were: "1<sup>st</sup>, the cumbersome debt; 2<sup>d</sup>, the high price charged for shares; and 3<sup>d</sup>, the increase of annual payments." The first of these was likened rather hideously to "an active, however much concealed, gangrene, constantly preying on" the Library's existence, and which, "if not extinguished or placed in the process of rapid reduction, must sooner or later result in ruin."

Three resolutions were recommended: one urged a reduction of the rates, as above recited; another called for "a public demonstration" to present "the object and aim of the Society to the attention of the citizens at large"; the third emphasized the need of removing "the heavy debt, which now presses with a blighting influence upon the prosperity of the Library." The board, how-



ever, "after spending considerable time" in discussion, adjourned without taking action.

Finally, in December following, the question was put to vote, when the above resolutions were lost and the minority report—drawn up by James De P. Ogden and Charles M. Leupp—was adopted, by a vote of eight to four. This involved no change in the prevailing rates, but enjoined upon the members of the Library a systematic endeavor "to obtain increased subscriptions." It also exacted the appointment of "a suitable Collector"<sup>1</sup> to solicit "likely" purchasers, the preparation of "a short Address," and a pledge from each Trustee to secure "from five to ten subscribers, or at least to devote a portion of his time and attention to that object."

The required "short Address" appears in full on the records for April, 1849, having been signed in January by the entire board. It is a 300-word statement, clear and concise, setting forth the chief facts and features and needs of the institution, already so familiar. In conclusion "an earnest appeal" is made to the public, "in behalf of this time-honored and valuable Institution,"—"the only public Library, properly so-called, in our city,"—and "aid is respectfully solicited on the score of ancient recollection, of city pride, of individual benefit, and of public utility."

Notwithstanding such efforts, the next annual report showed but a slight increase in membership and a lessening of the debt by only \$500, leaving still an incubus of \$49,000. These facts as to the "stationary condition of the Library"—"whilst the population and prosperity of our City are rapidly progressing"—are embodied in

<sup>1</sup> On January 30, 1849, it is stated that "Mr. [H. D.?] Neal had been appointed Collector."

another long report by the same majority members of the identical "Select Committee" of two years before. Covering several pages of the records for April, 1850, it concludes with an earnest renewal of the resolutions before rejected. They again met with defeat, the majority of the board strongly opposing any reduction in the price of shares.

However, at this disheartening time no slight relief was felt over the payment, in November, 1850, of a legacy of \$5000 from the estate of Miss Elizabeth Demilt, long a devoted member of the Library, who died in August, 1849. Much as the Trustees would have liked to perpetuate her name and gift in some fitting manner,—such as a special fund or alcove,—the needs of the hour were too pressing. So the timely benefaction was applied at once toward the extinction of the debt and thus almost sordidly lost to sight; but the moral encouragement of this first pecuniary donation to the institution, then nearly a century old, cannot be overmeasured. Full honor to the generosity of Elizabeth Demilt, the Society Library's first benefactor, and, in all reverence, let this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her.<sup>1</sup>

To resume the series of faithful attempts at lightening the incumbrances of the Library. The Treasurer's statement of April, 1851, showed the wholesome effect of the Demilt bequest, the entire debt having dropped to \$44,200. A year later \$700 more had been paid off;

<sup>1</sup> Miss Demilt bequeathed over \$80,000 to some twenty literary and charitable institutions of the city, all in amounts of from two to five thousand dollars. Receipt of the legacy was publicly acknowledged by Treasurer Rodgers, in the *Evening Post* of Nov. 9th, as "the only

instance of such liberality" in the history of the Library. Through an unaccountable error the name of this good lady is given as Miss *Jane* Demilt, in the "Historical Notice of the Library," prefacing the Catalogue of 1850, and in all subsequent sketches of the institution.

but at the same time the auditing committee reported an excess of expenditure over income. To make matters worse, it also appeared from another exhaustive research that the number of shares had fallen to 1110, or a loss of sixteen in two years. This report, signed by Messrs. Titus, De Peyster, Hobart and Leupp, sounds like a dreary echo of the past, far from reassuring.

Happily, better days were drawing nigh. A rise in property values was again coming to the succor of the Library; in January, 1853, Mr. Ogden formally notified the board of the sale of the Broadway building, on the 18th of December preceding, to Mr. Daniel D. Howard, for \$110,000. This was a grateful announcement, especially in view of the fact that, only two years before, the Trustees had vainly tried to realize \$85,000 on the property. The terms of the transfer were: \$10,000 in cash; the rest to be paid on the 1st of May following, on taking possession; and the existing mortgage to be assumed by the purchaser. In conclusion, "the gas-light fixtures and book cases of all sorts to be reserved to the Library," and "the seller to pay the broker 1 per cent." After the reading of the contract, the first act of the Trustees was to authorize Treasurer Rodgers to discharge the bond held by the New York Life Insurance and Trust Company, to which corporation it had been assigned by ex-Treasurer Harison. In the meantime it had been reduced from \$8000 to \$3500.

No less strange than refreshing to the long-drooping spirits of the Trustees must have seemed the appointment in May, 1853, of a committee on "the best mode of investing the surplus funds belonging to this corporation." The Treasurer had then received the balance of the purchase money from Mr. Samuel F. Appleton,



—to whom Mr. Howard had assigned his interest in the deed,—and the \$40,000-bond and mortgage had at last been shifted to other shoulders.

At the next meeting the special committee reported bonds and mortgages as the “most proper securities” for investment, at the same time presenting a list of seven persons willing to borrow amounts varying from \$2500 to \$17,500. The Treasurer was empowered to distribute sums aggregating \$15,000 among three of them, on his “satisfying himself” that the property offered was “worth double the amount to be loaned.” A further direction to have the titles approved shows that the lesson of the not-remote past had been learned.

These last two sessions of the Trustees were held at the office of Joshua Coit, 11 Wall street, for in the meantime the collections of the Library had been removed from the Broadway building. In April, 1853, a two years’ lease was taken of “a suite of rooms in the second story of the new building” of the American Bible Society, at the corner of Third avenue and Astor place, the rental being fixed at \$2400. A room on the third floor was also engaged for \$150 a year, as a Trustee meeting-place.

Toward the end of 1853 the books were threatened with destruction, to judge from a minute of December 7th, awarding ten dollars to the custodian, George Paterson, “for the services of himself and family on the occasion of the fire that lately occurred in the Bible House, which endangered the safety of the Library.” At that time the institution was carrying an insurance of only \$8000 on its books and furniture. For the previous ten years premiums had been paid for \$20,000 on the building and \$10,000 on the books.

At the end of March, 1854,<sup>1</sup> the Society Library completed its one-hundredth year. It is a fitting time to pause to take account of stock; and highly gratifying is the situation revealed in the Treasurer's report. Wholly freed from debt at last, with a collection of books worth many thousands of dollars and a membership roll of over 1100 persons, there was indeed every reason for confidence, especially after the laconic statement of the auditing committee on April 5th, that "the whole property of the Library consists (excluding its books) of the sum of \$67,360.01."

<sup>1</sup> It was voted, April 12, 1842, that the fiscal year should "determine on the 31st of March."

## IX

1854-1879

**N**O public celebration, not even a casual word in the minutes, marked the centennial anniversary of founding the Society Library. Although the institution was at last out of debt and possessed of a fund of nearly \$70,000, it was homeless, practically stowed away in hired rooms.

Pending preparations for reestablishment, it is fitting to scan the new names on the roll of Trustees, fully fifty appearing in the next quarter-century. Nine of them, however, as will presently be seen, declined or resigned within a few months of their election, in 1855,—a phenomenon unique in the history of the Library. Excluding these from calculation, therefore, the average tenure for the others is found to be a little over twelve years, a number of terms under five years being counterbalanced by several of great length.

Charles E. Strong, a learned, accomplished and successful lawyer, an original member of the local Bar Association, prominent in public and private charities and a popular figure in social life, was a Trustee of the Library for forty-two years, the longest period but one in its history, serving also as Treasurer and as Chairman; the Hon. Charles R. Swords, one-time Chairman



also, held a trusteeship of over thirty years; Otis D. Swan, a lawyer of great urbanity, a member of the finance committee of the Common Council, was Treasurer for nearly the whole of his twenty-two-year term; William Adams, for twenty years "distinguished for his earnest, constant and useful service in the interests of this Society, for his uprightness as a merchant, and for his character as a Christian gentleman"; Robert Lenox Kennedy, an influential financier, president of the Bank of Commerce, whose name will ever be held in grateful remembrance by the Library for his services and gifts in connection with the Green Art Alcove, as for his useful term of over thirty years, ending only with his death; the Hon. William J. Hoppin, Secretary for nearly his whole trusteeship of two decades, honored as a founder and a president of the Union League Club, a trustee of the Astor Library, and secretary of the American legation at the Court of St. James'; Henry C. Dorr, a lawyer of quiet but wide influence, served for twenty-five years; Edward Schell, Treasurer for almost fourteen of his nearly twenty-three years' service to the Library, held similar positions of trust and confidence in numerous other associations, mercantile, religious, social and political; Professor Henry Drisler, who also died in office, in the twenty-fifth year of his trusteeship, was long the lucid interpreter of the classics at Columbia College, its dean and twice its acting president, and a vestryman and warden of Trinity parish; Frederick Sheldon and Frederic J. de Peyster,<sup>1</sup> who began long terms of service within this period, belong more intimately throughout the next, and even beyond.

<sup>1</sup> At some time in this period the style of writing this family name was changed from "De Peyster" (hither-

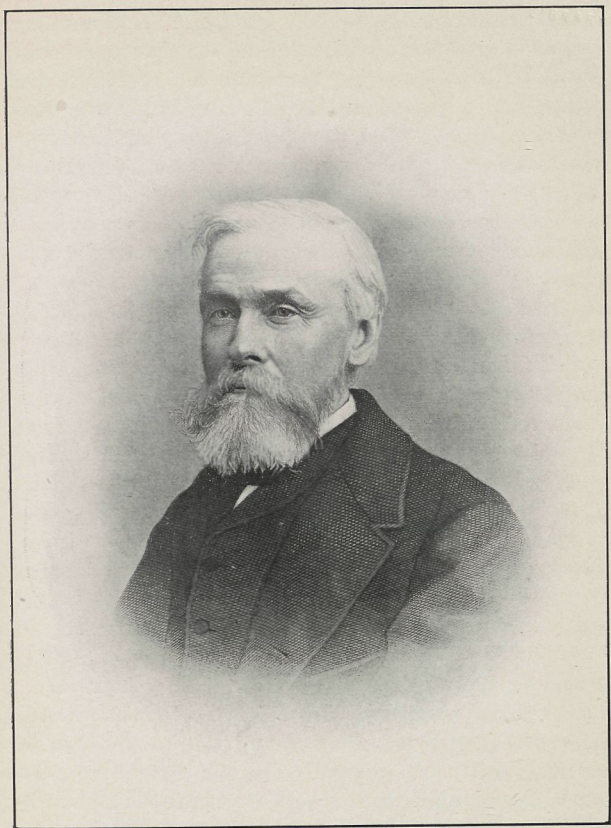
to prevailing) to "de Peyster" (as now in vogue).

Evert A. Duyckinck, whose death occurred in the twentieth year of his incumbency, was preëminently a man of letters; compiler of the "Dictionary of American Literature," author of numerous historical and biographical works, as well as editor and constant contributor to magazines, he also served, besides the Library, St. Thomas's Church, as clerk of the vestry, and the Historical Society and Columbia College, as a trustee. Another whose devotion to the Library ended only with death was Colonel Richard T. Auchmuty, in his eighteenth year of service, an architect of more than local repute, a vestryman of Old Trinity (from whose third rector, Dr. Samuel Auchmuty, he was directly descended), a gentleman ever possessed of great personal charm; Francis A. Stout, a quiet individual of liberal views; John M. Knox, a leading lawyer; Dr. Thomas Ward, famous for his talent in dramatic and operatic art, composer of "The Gypsy Queen"; Stephen P. Nash, a lawyer particularly eminent in church litigations, a vestryman of Trinity parish for many years, as also a trustee of Columbia College, whose law school he greatly furthered and in the establishment of whose school of political science he was deeply interested; J. Romeyn Brodhead, the celebrated state historian of New York; William Allen Butler, a prominent lawyer of the front rank, renowned for several satirical poems, the most noted being "Nothing to Wear"; and, last of this group of Trustees of between twelve and twenty years' standing, Stacy B. Collins, a member of the Society of Friends, a successful printer and publisher, whose blameless life was filled with acts of unassuming benevolence.

First-elected Trustee of this period stands the name

of the Hon. John Bigelow, journalist, lawyer, author and diplomatist, for years editor of the *Evening Post*, and minister to France during the Civil War, who continues his literary pursuits to-day, though past ninety years of age, active besides as president of the Century Association and of the New York Public Library trustees. Other short terms were held by the Hon. Charles E. Anderson, once stationed at Paris in the consular service, a founder of the Union Club; J. P. Giraud Foster, a lawyer much given to antiquarian research; Dr. O. Wolcott Gibbs, a founder of the Union League Club, distinguished scientist, now residing at Newport, professor emeritus of chemistry at Harvard, where he enjoyed uncommon popularity among undergraduates; Henry Van Schaick, well read in law, though devoting himself to varied interests, Secretary of the board for one year; the Hon. William H. Anthon, judge-advocate on Governor Morgan's staff in the Civil War; George C. Anthon, a founder of the Union League Club, long interested in educational work; Benjamin H. Field, a citizen of rare public spirit, a founder of the free library system, a director and trustee of financial, charitable and literary institutions without number; General Robert Le Roy, of Civil War gallantry, an officer in the Union Club, a man of social gifts and striking personal attractions; Robert Kelly, a public-spirited merchant, the first regular Chairman of the Library; Dr. George T. Elliot, Jr., of the Bellevue faculty, a handsome figure in social life; Lewis C. Jones, of an old New York family; the Hon. George Folsom, United States Minister at The Hague, a notable book collector; James P. Cronkhite, successful merchant, president of the Bank of Commerce, "a public-spirited man, forward in all good





Evert Augustus Duyckinck  
Trustee, 1859-1878



undertakings"; Edgar S. Van Winkle, a leader at the local bar; Adam T. Sackett, retired merchant, a vestryman of Old Trinity for many years; the Hon. William McMurray, state senator, a thoroughgoing Tammany politician, than whom no Trustee was ever more active in securing members, for, says Librarian Emeritus Butler, "he never attended a meeting of the board without presenting the name of at least one new subscriber"; Judge Thomas W. Clerke, of English birth, "a typical Sir Roger de Coverley," says the same authority; Richard E. Mount, a man of marked social tastes and generous impulses, a devout student of early New York and deeply interested in musical and dramatic affairs; Treasurer of the Library at his death, he bequeathed to the institution \$1000, which modest sum is nevertheless the sole legacy from a Trustee; George Cabot Ward, a founder and a president of the Union League Club, a banker of high standing; and the Hon. John L. Cadwalader, formerly Assistant Secretary of State, an active lawyer of this city to-day, identified, as trustee, with such public concerns as the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum and the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

These two-score names, together with those of the last period who continued their ministrations in behalf of the Library, are plainly the names of representative men, whom any institution would be proud to claim as directors of its concerns. We are now to follow them in the conduct of their charge, throughout an epoch momentous and trying in national history.

By 1854 plans were well under way for a new location for the Library. The first intimation had come in May, 1850, in a last vain conference with the Historical So-



ciety "on the subject of a site and building suitable for the objects of both Institutions, or for accommodations in such building, on terms to be made mutually satisfactory," the Library's deputies being Messrs. Delafield, de Peyster, Ogden, Rodgers and Leupp. The joint committee favored securing land "in the upper part of the city"—in the vicinity of Fourteenth street!—and the erection of a building jointly, but adapted to the purposes of each Society, "separately and not in common," save perhaps the reading and lecture rooms. No action, however, was taken by either board; in April, 1851, the Historical Society announced the purchase of "a site for its separate use."

Meanwhile, in June, 1850, Messrs. Ogden, Leupp and Beekman had been commissioned to dispose of the Broadway building, with what success we have seen; and in May, 1853, Messrs. Williams, Anderson and Rodgers consummated an arrangement with Mrs. Adeline E. Schermerhorn, widow of Peter Augustus Schermerhorn, a former Trustee, for the three lots on the east side of University place, on which the present building stands. The price agreed upon was \$18,650, with certain conditions, the Trustees agreeing not to erect within forty feet of the front of the premises "any building save of brick or stone of at least two stories in height," nor to "erect, permit or suffer upon the said premises or any part thereof any public school, theatre or other place for public amusement, or any other place for any other trade, business or occupation dangerous, noxious or offensive to the neighbouring inhabitants."

According to an itemized memorandum, Mr. Dudley S. Gregory, the owner of the lots in question, was first paid for them the sum of \$21,000 by Mrs. Schermer-

horn. Then by a sort of neighborhood covenant the difference between that amount and the price charged to the Library was made up by voluntary contributions. Next, after repaying Mrs. Schermerhorn the resulting difference of \$2350,—less \$850 for an extra gore, or an even \$1500,—the residue of the subscription money, \$41.75, was paid to Treasurer Rodgers as a balance in favor of the institution, collected “for the purpose of inducing the said Library to purchase and build.”

Active steps toward building were taken after the annual meeting of 1854, when the old board was re-elected with a single exception, John Bigelow in place of Edward Jones. Messrs. Verplanck, de Peyster and Anderson were at once empowered to have plans and estimates prepared and to call for bids. By March, 1855, the Trustees had ratified the choice of Messrs. T. Thomas & Son as architects and had approved mason’s and carpenter’s contracts.

By a strange freak of fate, however, the men who had borne the heat and burden of the wilderness through so long a day were destined as a board never to reach the promised land, almost within their vision. On turning the leaves for the report of the annual election of 1855, one is amazed to find not a single familiar name. As usual, no explanation is vouchsafed by the inscrutable minutes, but hearsay has it that almost at the moment of closing the polls a company of the younger element hurriedly entered and voted out the unprepared old board to a man.

Scarce crediting their senses and reluctant to acknowledge so summary a discharge, the former Trustees asserted that the election was illegal, on the ground that Charles R. Swords was not a member of the corpora-

tion; but upon conclusive proofs of his eligibility they were perforce "disposed to acquiesce." Only four of them were ever returned to office, Messrs. Verplanck, Beekman, de Peyster and Williams; in the case of the last-named, after a lapse of more than twenty years.

Dissatisfaction or impatience with the management is believed to have been the cause of this startling *coup*; but it had apparently been planned without the concurrence of all the newly chosen Trustees. Whether they were not in full sympathy with the movement, or whether their names had been used without sanction, or whether they simply felt unable to cope with the situation, we do not know. The fact remains, however, that long before the end of the official year no fewer than nine of the fifteen gentlemen either had declined to act or had tendered their resignations<sup>1</sup>; and of the remaining six, only Mr. Swords served for more than four years. All vacancies, however, were promptly filled by the board, agreeably to the interests of shareholders, judging by subsequent elections; three so chosen, Charles E. Strong, Otis D. Swan and William Adams, remained Trustees for over a score of years.

Wholly alive to the heavy responsibilities pressing upon their inexperience, the new board at once authorized a searching examination into the affairs of the institution. The first matter for attention was very naturally the status of the new building. Having ascertained that the contracts were binding and that excavating had actually begun, they carried the undertaking as quickly as possible to completion. During the summer

<sup>1</sup> George T. Strong, George J. Cornell, Henry R. Winthrop, George R. J. Bowdoin, George G. Waters, Jacob Harsen, M.D., Robert C.

Goodhue, Cornelius Du Bois, and Martin R. Zabriskie (later written "Zborowski").



the corner-stone was laid, and the Trustees met for the first time in the almost finished structure on April 28, 1856. According to the inspectors' report, the annual election was held next day, "in the new edifice situate in University Avenue."

A brief description of this third Library building appears in the printed annual report of the Trustees in March, 1856. The longer account quoted below, from Valentine's "Manual"<sup>1</sup> for 1856, should prove interesting as a contemporary statement of the merits of the stately structure, to-day, as for more than fifty years, the home of the New York Society Library.

The new edifice has fifty-two feet front, leaving a space unoccupied on each side, so as to give light by windows to the interior. Toward the rear, however, the building spreads out and covers the whole width of the lot [104 feet]. The front is in the Italian style of architecture. The entrance is ornamented with coupled Corinthian pilasters, supporting the entablature, over which is a balustrade inclosing a small balcony. The door is surrounded by an architrave with keystone. The wall is faced with ashlar, with horizontal grooves cut into it, and supports a cornice. Above the first story is a pedestal, on which rest the piers and window ornaments. The angles of the piers have rustic quoins running up to the cornice at the top of the building. The windows in the side divisions are [have] ornamented architraves and pilasters supporting consols, which in turn support the cornice and pediment. The middle window contains a triple window with Corinthian pilasters and entablature, in the frieze of which is the inscription "Founded A.D. 1754." Over the windows are stone panels. Those in the side divisions are filled with ornaments. The one over the middle window contains the name of the building, "Society Library." The walls are faced with fine bricks, above which is a massive entab-

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of the Corporation of the City of New-York for 1856.*  
By D. T. Valentine. Pp. 545-548.

lature of iron, consisting of an architrave, frieze and cornice, over which is a continued balustrade between pedestals.

On entering the front door, the visitor finds himself in a hall forty-seven feet long and twelve wide, handsomely paved with tessalated pavement. On the left hand is a comfortable room for a ladies' reading room, sixteen feet by thirty. A similar room on the right is used as a conversation room. At the end of the hall are folding doors opening into the large reading room, thirty-one feet by seventy-three, well lighted and well furnished with papers and periodicals. In the hall, near the entrance to the large reading room, an easy flight of stairs leads to the library, which offers to view a noble apartment, thirty-five feet high, and taking in the whole depth and width of the building, having pleasant and quiet alcoves below, with two galleries rising above and receding as they rise, leading the eye up to the oblong dome of the roof, that with its fine large skylight sends down a flood of light on all below. The galleries are also divided into alcoves, and the whole building most conveniently and comfortably arranged, affording room for 100,000 volumes.

The cost of this handsome structure approximated \$55,560. Thus, including the price paid for the land, the total expenditures amounted to about \$75,000; consequently the institution was once again in debt. However, it was soon set free from that evil and has never suffered a recapture, as will appear in the narrative.

Next on the programme is a less conspicuous but fully as vital an interest, the membership roll. It was found that there were registered 1087 shares, of which 103 were "free," or exempt from annual dues. "Stringent measures" were first urged against delinquents, closely seconded by exertions at enlarging the list of members.

In furtherance of this plan a public gathering was called for the evening of February 15, 1856, at Hope Chapel, 718 Broadway, at which, according to the pa-

pers,<sup>1</sup> fully 150 persons were present. An address was delivered by the lately appointed Librarian, John MacMullen, on "The Past, the Present, and the Future of the New York Society Library." The discourse proved so entertaining and stimulating that it was at once ordered to be published and "widely circulated."<sup>2</sup> Copies of this address are still available in the Library, and might be distributed with profit even after the lapse of a full half-century, so fundamental and convincing are its arguments in favor of a more general support of the Society Library.

Although much of the matter relating to the "Past" is inaccurate, Mr. MacMullen can hardly be blamed, as he had but scanty sources to draw from, while the pleasing images and contrasts depicted are most effective. On the "Present" he writes with authority, and on the "Future" with conviction. All in all, it is an able presentation of "the practical, material and profitable uses of a great Public Library." The paper concludes with the following idealistic conception:

Through the dim haze that veils the future, I see the interior of a noble Library with all its manifold enjoyments—an ample Reading-Room, whither the Telegraph, on lightning wings, concentrates intelligence from all quarters of the world—a Conversation-Room, where brilliant wit and profound remark cheer the heart, and excite the intellect: in short a place, from whose heaven all those influences that refine and ennoble our race lend each the soft ray of its star. The busy investigator, the educated citizen, the intelligent stranger, throng thither to enjoy and profit by "the feast of reason and the flow of soul."

<sup>1</sup> See notice in the *Daily Tribune*, February 16, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> *A Lecture on the Past, the Present and the Future of the New York*

*Society Library, delivered before the Shareholders, February 15th, 1856, by John MacMullen, Librarian.* New York, 1856.



Appended to the address is a list of members to date, showing a gain of twenty-six names since the new board took office. With each pamphlet went also a circular from a committee of shareholders, Messrs. Elias G. Brown, Jacob Harsen, and I. Green Pearson, to announce a speedy occupancy of the new building and bespeaking aid in procuring additional subscriptions to the amount of \$20,000.

A second rally was held on March 1st in the chapel of New York University, which meeting,<sup>1</sup> though slimly attended because of a severe storm, must have been enthusiastic, to judge by its fruits. For, in their annual report, dated March 31st, the Trustees state triumphantly that "the results thus far secured during the year are 131 new members, and 112 commuters of the annual dues." It is told of several of them, notably Henry Van Schaick, Charles E. Strong and Wolcott Gibbs, that they were driven in an open barouche on an actual house-to-house canvass in quest of subscribers, and in this spectacular fashion harvested many a hundred-dollar share. This large accession, beyond comparison with the paltry average of *two* for the past four years, was quaintly pronounced "animating."

In fact, so many changes were inaugurated by this active board that its advent truly "indicates the commencement of a new era in the progress of the Library."<sup>2</sup> Further, for example, the office of Chairman, hitherto simply temporary, was, in January, 1856, put on a yearly basis. Like the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Library Committee, a Chairman was henceforth to be chosen at "the first stated meeting after the annual election."

<sup>1</sup> See full account in the *Evening Post*, March 3, 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report, 1856, p. 3.

**Apostolick Charity,**  
 ITS  
**Nature and Excellence**  
 CONSIDER'D.  
 IN A  
**DISCOURSE**  
 Upon *Dan. 12. 3.*

**Preached at St. Pauls, Decemb. 19. 1697.**  
**at the Ordination of some Prote-**  
**stant Missionaries to be sent into the**  
**Plantations.**

To which is Prefixt,  
*A General View of the English Colonies in America, with  
 respect to Religion; In order to shew what Provision is  
 wanting for the Propagation of Christianity in those Parts.*

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By **Thomas Bray, D. D.**

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**L O N D O N,**  
 Printed by *W. Downing*, for *William Hawes*, at the Sign of the  
*Rose in Ludgate-Street, 1698.*

Nevertheless, this officer was not entrusted with an excess of executive power. His functions were limited to calling the annual meeting to order, and to summoning special meetings of the corporation upon the written request of at least fifty members, or upon a majority vote of the board, at which gatherings he was to preside until a chairman should be appointed. Lastly he was required to "prepare an annual report upon the affairs and condition of the institution," which report, upon ratification by the board, should be submitted to the shareholders at the annual meeting in April.

The first gentleman honored with an election as annual Chairman was Charles R. Swords, in January, 1856. On his declining to serve, the lot fell upon Robert Kelly. But the board was destined to a very brief "benefit from his highly cultivated taste and great experience," as he died suddenly in April. The Library "was but one of the many public institutions of the city, literary, educational and benevolent, which received his devoted attention, and had just cause to deplore his loss."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Kelly's successor as Chairman was Charles E. Anderson, who, however, resigned from the board in October. He was followed in February, 1858, by Charles R. Swords; but in May Gulian C. Verplanck, returned to his long-familiar place as Trustee, was unanimously chosen Chairman, a post he held until his death in March, 1870, "with his accustomed ability and practical good sense."<sup>2</sup> He was succeeded in this office by Frederic de Peyster, who served continuously in turn until his own decease in August, 1882.

Another innovation of this reactionary board was the

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 1857, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report, 1870, p. 6.



publication of an annual report to the shareholders, just before the election of 1856. It was a frank and engaging statement of their aims, difficulties and achievements since the "sweeping change" put them under responsibility. This measure commending itself generally, it has become a settled and indispensable usage.

This first annual report is printed in a pamphlet of sixteen pages, which contains also the Treasurer's statement and that of the auditing committee. Later it came to be the practice to include lists of newspapers and magazines on the reading room tables, as also the yearly accessions to the shelves. In addition there are given the names of Trustees and officers, the terms of membership, and the hours of opening and closing. The Library has a set of these reports neatly bound in two volumes, including the year 1892, which, together with the readily available issues since that date, make the history and progress of the institution practically an open book.

All matters of an executive nature continued to be entrusted to the Library Committee, despite the proposed creation, in January, 1872, of an executive committee, to absorb all the functions of the former, except an oversight of the reading room and of the books themselves. Also, as formerly, it was habitual for the same Trustees to serve year after year. In May, 1860, its number was raised from five to six, the Treasurer and the Secretary remaining members *ex officio*. The gentlemen of this period conspicuous for length of term were Mr. Dorr, twelve years, Mr. Brodhead, thirteen, Mr. Strong, sixteen, Mr. Duyckinck, nineteen, and Mr. Kennedy, thirty years.

Soon after that same revolution in the management,

also, a change of Librarians was made. On May 17, 1855, it was voted "that Mr. Forbes be requested to resign," which he promptly did four days later. Certain strained relations between him and the Trustees as to money matters were presently adjusted by the Library's taking a small second mortgage on his Staten Island real estate; and at the annual meeting in 1856 the shareholders voted to forgive him the debt. As has been said, Mr. Forbes was unremitting in his regard for the institution. For instance, in the following August he informed his successor that he had discovered in an auction-sale catalogue—"forming the library of the late Henry Austin Brady, Esq."—more than eighty works long missing from the Library, which books, with one exception, were presently identified and cheerfully restored by the executors.

No time was lost in securing a new Librarian. Notices in local and Washington papers announced the vacancy, requesting "applicants for the station" to address "testimonials" to the Library Committee.<sup>1</sup> Results showed the desirability of the office, for no fewer than forty-seven persons applied, of whom the committee recommended five to the consideration of the board, June 6th. On the first ballot John MacMullen, a shareholder, was chosen unanimously. His salary was determined at \$1200, a noticeable advance over that hitherto paid.<sup>2</sup> The printed annual report of 1856 said he was "well qualified and adapted for the place," serving "to the satisfaction of the Trustees and Members, and all others with whom he has been brought into intercourse."

John MacMullen, A.M., was born in New York city

<sup>1</sup> See the *Evening Post*, May 28, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 419.

in 1818, of Scotch-Irish parentage. He was graduated from Columbia College with honors at the early age of nineteen, after which came several years of European travel and study. Upon his return he entered the teaching profession, in which his linguistic abilities brought him success. He was an interesting speaker, and, besides the address on the Society Library, he delivered a course of lectures on literary subjects in the new building during the winter of 1856-1857, being "honored with the attendance of an intelligent and appreciating audience."<sup>1</sup>

With all his cultivation, however, Mr. MacMullen was opinionated, outspoken and impatient of restraint, traits of temperament incompatible with the traditions of his office. He presently became involved in a disagreement with the Library Committee, which continued to regard itself, in spirit at least, as the "head Librarian," formerly so termed.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of this lack of harmony, all the members of the committee, Messrs. Anthon, Gibbs, Kennedy, Secretary Van Schaick and Treasurer Strong, simultaneously resigned. An ensuing investigation found "that the official acts of the Library Committee fail to afford a justification for the persisting objection of the Librarian, much less, acrimony of feeling on his part towards the members of the Committee," and that the regrettable conflict had "arisen from a misapprehension on the part of the Librarian of the requirements of the constitution and by-laws, rather than from any desire to embarrass the Committee."

Though these gentlemen promptly withdrew their resignations, further friction soon arose, and the dispute

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 1857, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 417.



was carried into the annual meeting of 1857. Mr. MacMullen distributed a printed memorial<sup>1</sup> among the members, to announce his intended resignation and to set forth his explanation of the Library's "stagnation," while "all the other large libraries in the city were making progress." It was chiefly due, he declared in crisp sentences of hard-headed logic, to the lamentably subordinate position of the Librarian and to the vesting of power in one "Committee Man," who had not been trained to the "business" of a Librarian. This protest evoked a hasty circular<sup>2</sup> in rebuttal, signed simply "A Friend of the Library," which was hardly more than a personal attack, ending with the query: "Shall we have an *ornamental Librarian* like Mr. MacMullen, sitting in the *upper alcoves* of the Library, or an efficient *working Librarian at the desk*?"

Inasmuch as the annual report of the next year characterizes this election as "a contest . . . exceeding in spirit any thing that had ever been known in the history of the Library," it is proper to quote the following account in the *Evening Post* of April 29, 1857:

*New York Society Library—Annual Report—The  
MacMullen Controversy*

\* \* \* \* \*

Two tickets for Trustees were in the field—one bearing the names of the old Trustees, and the other supposed to be favorable to Mr. MacMullen, the Librarian, between whom and the old Board a serious misunderstanding has arisen. It appears from a pamphlet by Mr. MacMullen, issued yesterday, that he had removed his desk in the library from the main floor to the

<sup>1</sup> *To the Shareholders of the New York Society Library.* April 28, 1857. 10 pp.

*York Society Library.* A copy is in the Library of the Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> *To the Shareholders of the New-*

gallery, and that the committee ordered him to resume the old place. This he thought arbitrary, and in his pamphlet contends that the Librarian should have control of the library, as otherwise no man respecting himself can hold office.

At the meeting last night an anonymous paper was liberally circulated, stating that it was evident Mr. MacMullen wished to usurp entire management, and otherwise reflecting upon his course. After the adoption of the [annual] report, he asked to be heard in relation to these charges. Mr. Anthon thought he ought not to heed an anonymous paper; but the meeting voted to hear him, and he proceeded to defend himself, saying among other things, that he thought his services were worth more than \$1200 to the Library, and therefore he did not think it immodest to ask an advance of his salary.

While in the midst of his explanations, the chairman received a letter from five of the gentlemen whose names were upon Mr. MacMullen's ticket, in which they stated that the use of their names was wholly unauthorized, and disclaimed all connection with the affair. Four or five others whose names were on the ticket, and who were present, hereupon arose and made the same statement with relation to themselves.

The chairman announced that the time had arrived to open the polls, and the voting began. The contest was spirited, and the result was not known until after 12 o'clock. The old Board was re-elected, with the exception of Mr. Strong, who was defeated by three majority. . . .

The annual report of 1858 says further of this affair:

The unusual excitement attending the election and the unprecedentedly large vote cast, were a pleasing evidence of the interest felt in the Institution by its shareholders. Experience has proved that no Public Institution, however worthy its Managers may be, can flourish as it ought, while an apathetic disposition is manifested by the large number who constitute its body. An excitement, such as characterized the last election, tends not only to keep alive the interest of the shareholders, but also to stimulate and increase the energy and efficiency of the Trustees.

When the Trustees met, May 6th, Mr. MacMullen's resignation was duly read, to take effect on May 26th; but the board rather resentfully—though, it is good to see, not unanimously—voted that the resignation “be laid upon the table and that he be informed that his connection with the Library is dissolved from the present date.” An address to the shareholders, “in answer to Mr. MacMullen's statement,” was next ordered prepared; but, if ever framed, no copy has survived.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the retirement of Treasurer Strong, the same report says:

The defeat of this gentleman was a matter of much regret to the Trustees, who alone knew with what zeal and efficiency he had devoted himself to the duties of his office, and the difficulty they would experience in adequately filling his place. It was satisfactory to know, however, that in the gentleman [Mr. Verplanck] elected by the shareholders in the place of Mr. Strong, the Library would secure the services of one of its oldest and warmest friends; one whose scholarship and long experience in the conduct of its affairs would be productive of the greatest advantage to it.

The report, however, neglects to add that, coincidentally with its abrupt dismissal of Mr. MacMullen, the board reappointed Mr. Strong a Trustee (as also Treasurer), in place of Benjamin H. Field, who, it is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. MacMullen returned to the calling of a teacher, in which he gained notable success; his ideas were advanced and eminently sensible. He introduced “self-government” by his pupils, under which system matters of discipline were submitted to a board of arbitration; and he gave practical instruction in the simple methods of business and banking, preparing paper coinage of all denominations. Other fea-

tures of his private school for boys were its gymnasium, military drill, library, manual training classes, and holiday excursions to places of historic interest and to factories, local institutions, etc. He was one of the founders of the Washington Heights Free Library in 1868; and for several years prior to his death, in 1893, assisted in arranging and compiling the early records of Columbia College.



said, had resigned on that understanding. One month later, for reasons not now remembered, Mr. Strong himself resigned; but, after an interval of temporary Treasurers and further resignations,—the causes of which are equally obscure,—he was, in October, again returned to his former offices, Secretary Hoppin advising him of his “unanimous election” and of the board’s “earnest wishes” for his acceptance. He acquiesced gracefully and remained a Trustee until 1897, though holding the treasurership only until May, 1859.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 1857 the appointment of a new Librarian was carefully considered. Many applications were received, some bearing the weighty endorsements of trained men like Librarians Poole of the Boston Athenæum, Herrick of Yale College and Cogswell of the Astor Library, or of such influential laymen as the Hon. Edward Everett of Massachusetts, Washington Irving, Fitz-Greene Halleck and S. B. Ruggles. Finally, on October 7th, Wentworth S. Butler, who had been assistant and acting Librarian since December, 1855, was chosen on the third ballot, and the election was made unanimous, his salary being set at \$1200.

Wentworth Sanborn Butler, youngest son of the Hon. Josiah Butler of New Hampshire, was born in that state, September 30, 1826, and was graduated with honor from Dartmouth College in 1848. After a year of special study at Harvard, followed by a season’s teaching in Maryland, he took the three-year divinity course at Union Seminary in New York city. Such a

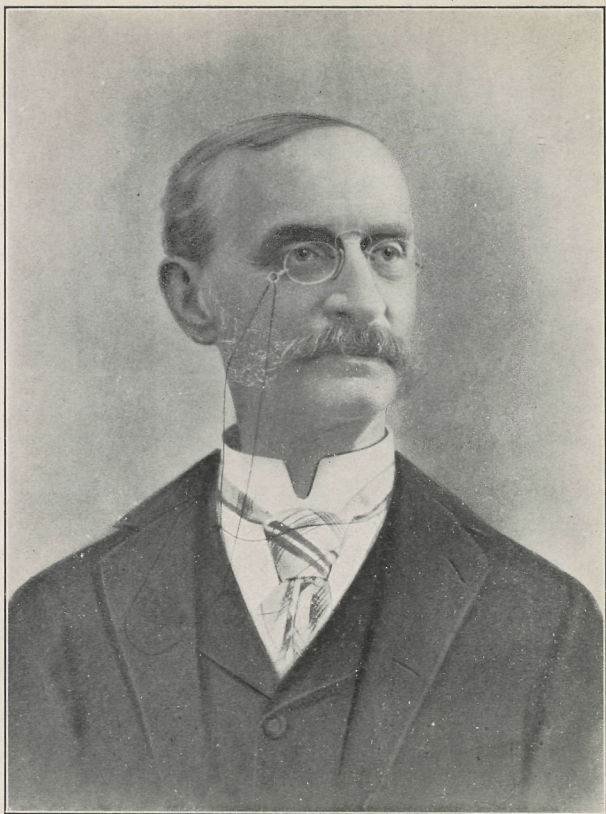
<sup>1</sup> Another incident, in itself trifling, is illustrative of the confusion at this contested election. By a press error the suffix “Jr.” was omitted from Dr. Elliot’s name on the ticket;

consequently his father was elected, duly notified and forced to send a formal note of explanation to “decline the honor,” the board promptly repairing the inadvertent mistake.

procedure was not thought inconsistent for even the stanch churchman that Mr. Butler has ever been, but rather indicative of real catholicity of temper. He nevertheless presently abandoned his design of taking orders, and soon entered on what was to be his uninterrupted life-work—the librarianship of the Society Library. Says the annual report of 1858: “Mr. Butler has discharged the duties with fidelity and ability, and apparently to the entire satisfaction of the shareholders.”

Beginning with January, 1867, the Librarian's salary was advanced to \$1500; that his services were valued is inferable from his unbroken incumbency and from his very lack of mention in the minutes. Now and then a word is dropped to show the high esteem in which he was held by successive boards. For instance, in April, 1875, Treasurer Swan concludes his annual report in these words: “The increase of dues is to a great extent owing to the aid of the Librarian in collecting arrears. It has been persistent and successful as no one else could have made it.” Again, in May, 1877, under inspiration from the substantial Dorr and Green benefactions, the Trustees unanimously voted Mr. Butler a donation of \$500, “in view of his long and faithful service, and of the interest he has taken in advancing the welfare of the institution.” Attached to this appreciative resolution, however, was the canny proviso, “as soon as the Treasurer shall be in funds.” So it is not wholly surprising, though none the less disappointing, to learn that thirteen months later the board felt constrained to reduce the gift to “one half the sum previously voted.”

The time for Trustee meetings varied little with the years. Between 1838 and 1884, barring the brief inter-



Wentworth Sanborn Butler

Assistant Librarian, 1855-1857. Librarian, 1857-1895

Librarian Emeritus, 1895—





val in 1877, noted below, the date for stated meetings was rather intricately scheduled to be "the first Wednesday after the fourth day of every month except August, and also on the day next before the last Tuesday of April." The hour, however, met with alterations: from May, 1848, to May, 1856, it was half-past six; then half-past seven until April, 1871; and eight o'clock thereafter, with the exception of six months between May and November, 1877, when the time was set at four o'clock on "the second Monday of every month except August." The former practice was "restored" on motion of the same Trustee who had proposed the change—Mr. Strong. Yet this seeming contradiction should not betoken whimsicalness, but rather a sensible acknowledgment of misjudgment, for a quorum had been obtained only once out of seven attempts in the meantime.

Under the by-laws of 1856 the hour of the annual corporation meeting was shifted from noon to seven o'clock in the evening; while the balloting time, previously from one to four in the afternoon, was henceforth to be from eight until half-past ten at night. A radical and noteworthy change was made that year, to go into effect in 1857, allowing each member "one vote for every right held by him or her," the custom hitherto, from the very adoption of the Articles of the Subscription Roll in 1754, having expressly enjoined: "nor shall any member vote by proxy, nor in any case have more than one vote."<sup>1</sup>

This privilege of granting a vote for every right owned is the evident though tardy result of a statute passed in June, 1853, "for the incorporation of library

<sup>1</sup> By-law, printed in Catalogues of 1813, 1838, 1850.

companies," by which "each member shall be entitled to one vote on every such share held by him, and standing in his name on the books of the company." Voting by proxy, however, has never been permitted throughout the history of the Society Library, though expressly allowed by statute to members of all but religious corporations.

Apropos of the subject of proxy-voting, there was demanded, in 1860, a settlement of the long-mooted question, whether a minor shareholder had the right to vote, and, if not, whether the guardian of such "infant" could vote for him. A special report, signed by Messrs. Butler, Dorr and McMurray, was printed with the annual statement of 1860. Upon diligent inquiry and research it was determined that such a right did not exist, being wholly "without foundation" in law, but that it was "the right and duty of the guardian of a minor shareholder to appear at the corporate elections, and to give the vote appertaining to the share of his ward." The report closes thus facetiously:

By way of consolation to our infant members, we can only advise them to be content for the present with their undoubted right to marry and to make their wills of their personal estates, leaving to the future the important responsibility of voting for Trustees of the Society Library.

Continuing the outline of hours, in 1862 the election poll was closed at ten o'clock, and at half-past nine in 1867, while the next two years saw a temporary change to "9¼ o'clock P.M." In 1876 the shareholders' meeting was not convened until half-past seven, an amendment requested by the members themselves. As a rule these gatherings were slimly attended save on a few notable occasions. Since 1856 the minutes of their proceedings



have been recorded separately. Trifling as the chronicling of these variations in Trustee and shareholder meetings may seem, it is yet an integral part of the present work; and, furthermore, do not these same particulars have a real bearing on the life of the community, as an indicator of society's dinner hour, fluctuating under the dictates of fashion?

From time out of mind it had been customary to acknowledge the services of the election inspectors with a suitable entertainment after their evening's task, the matter usually being left with the committee nominating them. But in 1859 the janitor was authorized "to furnish proper refreshments" for the inspectors; and five years later this convivial commission of ascertaining and satisfying the taste of the above mentioned functionaries was entrusted, possibly for his name's sake, to the discriminating acumen of Librarian Butler. Then for a number of years Mr. Swords was selected as the "committee" on entertainment, but in 1872 Mr. Dorr was associated with him in dispensing rewards of merit to the thirsty inspectors. It so chanced on this occasion, or after it, more probably, that the long-neglected janitor took thought for himself, and so liberally did he minister unto his creature wants that when the building was broken open, late on the following day, he was found prone upon the floor, still living in the past. This episode marked the passing of the custom and, it is needless to add, of the janitor.<sup>1</sup>

In this connection it is pertinent to state that, from 1838 on, the reading room had been opened at eight o'clock in the morning. When the new building at 67

<sup>1</sup> During the treasurership of Mr. Mount, 1877-1880, he was accus-

tomed to give a dinner to the inspection committee.

University place—the number was not changed to 109 until 1897—was finished and ready for patrons in 1856, the reading room continued open until ten o'clock in the evening; while the loan department, hitherto closed at sunset, was kept open until nine o'clock from May first to November first, closing at eight in other months. The next year, books could not be taken out after seven o'clock, and in 1863, between November first and April first, not after six. Lastly, from 1864 to 1891 the hours for borrowers were from eight in the morning until six in the evening, and, for the reading room, eight in the morning until ten at night. In February, 1872, a request to have the building open on Sundays and holidays was voted "inexpedient" to grant.

Although the Librarian was required to "keep a full and accurate catalogue of all the books belonging to the corporation," and despite repeated assurances that "the new Catalogue, now in course of preparation, will soon be ready for distribution," the Catalogue of 1850 remains to this day, as in the nature of things it will ever remain, the last published work of the kind. The "list of additions" printed in each annual report did much to relieve the pressing need of a catalogue.

In the first of the regular series of annual reports, issued in 1856, the collection of books, which had been 35,000 volumes in 1850, is stated to comprise 40,000, "about 8000 in classic and foreign tongues, and the remainder English books."<sup>1</sup> In 1864, there were 54,000

<sup>1</sup> An excellent idea of the collection at the beginning of this period is given as follows in Valentine's *Manual* for 1856, pp. 547-548: "The Library now numbers about 40,000 volumes, a few manuscripts of modern date, maps and charts of

great value, a few sheets of ancient church music on vellum, numerous collections of engravings, a small but beautiful collection of bronze medals, one set of casts of the Elgin marbles, forty-eight in number, and one set of Waterloo medals, fifty in

volumes, and by 1879, the arbitrary limit set to this chapter, the collection had risen approximately to 70,000 in number.

Those who presided over the fortunes of the Library during the dark days of the Civil War are worthy of no ordinary commendation, not merely for having kept the institution out of debt, but also for having regularly added to its shelves. For, as was stated in the report for 1864, the advanced price of books and periodicals had "much restricted the Library Committee in their purchases and prevented them from procuring many costly and desirable foreign publications," while the increased cost of paper and labor had raised the price of new American books more than one half. Nevertheless, in 1865 the board took just satisfaction in announcing that "nearly all the productions of the American press of any value, whether original or reprints, have been procured." Furthermore, with the added funds arising from the advanced annual dues in 1866, a large order was sent abroad for "many publications of science and general literature."

A good idea of the purpose and work of the Library Committee in its chief function is gained from the following passages in the annual report for 1861, it being borne in mind that the committee was restricted from incurring any indebtedness.

This city has within a few years become one of the great book-marts of the world, not only for the publications of the Ameri-

number. One of the most curious collections of books in the Library is one of about 275 volumes presented to the society by the late Francis B. Winthrop, formerly the property of his ancestor, John Winthrop, first governor of Connecticut.

They relate chiefly to alchemy and magic, including books in regard to the Rosicrucians. A very important feature of the Library is its extensive files of newspapers, both of the present and last century. No library has taken more pains to obtain and



can press, but for older publications of all kinds and all ages and countries, thrown upon the market by the dispersion and sale of libraries and booksellers' stock, etc., here and in Europe. The Library Committee of this Board have carefully and constantly availed themselves of such opportunities to fill up at moderate cost many chasms in the catalogue of works of English literature, biography, and travels, published during the present century, but never reprinted in this country. The usual supply of the publications of the day, English and American, has also been kept up, together with that of the best current literature from the Paris press, and some German and Italian works. Besides the purchase of most original publications of the year, pains have been taken to fill up the deficiencies in general local American history and biography, in which departments the Library is becoming quite rich. Although far the greater number of these purchases were of works suited to the demands of the general reader, some valuable additions have been made in works of high science and ancient learning.

At the same time a special plea was made, and regularly repeated, for contributions to the collection of pamphlets, "whether political, theological, or scientific." Of such literature the Library possessed a store, as "the gradual and almost accidental accumulation of above sixty years," which might "easily be made in a still greater degree a body of information of incalculable value." This object would seem a trespassing on the domain of the Historical Society, were there any chance of rivalry at all with that colossal storehouse.

As before and since, gifts of books or other printed matter, averaging 150 volumes a year, were continually

preserve these daily records of current events. Their great utility for reference, both for public and private affairs, is demonstrated almost daily. The collection of historical and biographical works, and also

that of voyages and travels, is full, interesting and important. The number of French and Italian works is also considerable—the latter having been mostly presented to the society . . . by Mr. Da Ponte."

being made to the institution. Besides private acknowledgment of these, the annual reports from 1858 to 1868 contained lists of donors. Many volumes presented include publications of innumerable organizations of every description, with now and then documents from abroad.

In all, about 120 names of such benefactors are mentioned with gratefulness, those most frequently seen being, of the Trustees, Messrs. Verplanck, McMurray and Kennedy, and, of others, the Hon. John R. Bartlett, Librarian Butler, the Hon. J. Winthrop Chanler, the Hon. Frederick A. Conkling, Nathaniel S. Bowditch, Henry Onderdonk, Jr., General J. Watts de Peyster, Professor W. E. Eigenbrodt, of the General Seminary, David T. Valentine, for years clerk of the Common Council and editor of much valuable matter relating to city history, and Andrew H. Green, who only lately passed away, widely revered as the "Father of Greater New York." Masquerading among these patrons of literature, it is indeed amusing to find the name of a notorious personage, little associated with public benefits, that arch-reprobate and self-seeker, the Hon. William M. Tweed.

Not a few of these gifts had doubtless been prompted by appeals in the annual reports. It will therefore be well worth while to quote some of their statements, to learn just what claims and promises the institution was making for itself. Says the report for 1857:

The Public Library is to a certain extent a part of the grand university scheme; the completion of our system of public education. The student when he leaves the academy or college has but crossed the threshold of knowledge. The library now becomes his quiet lecture-room, and self-instruction from its resources must supply the place of the teacher.

Next, reference is made to the recent study of European libraries by Librarian S. Hastings Grant of the

### Eine Öffentliche Bekanntmachung.

**N**ACHDEME der General-Major ROBERTSON in Erfahrung gebracht hat, dasz die Bibliothec zu des Königs Hohen Schule gehörrig, wie auch die Bibliothec, der Bibliothec-Societät in der Stadt Neu-York Zuständig, sind beraubet worden, so wohl der Buecher, als auch eines Theils des Philosophischen Instrumenten u. s. f. Satzes: *So wird hiemit Iedermaenniglich Zuwissen gemacht*, dasz in denen Buechern Zu der Hohen Schule gehörrig das Wapen der Hohen Schule, oder das Wapen der Zu Fortpflanzung des Evangelii errichteten Societät fest gemacht oder figiret stehet; und in einigen derselben stehet das Wapen des Josephs Murray, Esqr; und dasz in denen Buechern der Stadt-Bibliothecs-Gesellschaft das Wapen besagter Gesellschaft figiret ist; oder, dasz die Zerfchiedene so entwendete Buecher sonsten so gezeichnet sind, dasz Iedermann wissen kan, wem selbige allerseits Zugehören. Und allen Personen, in deren Händen einige der besagten Buecher, oder einiger Theil des Philosophischen Instrumenten u. s. f. Satzes dermalen sind, auf Wasserley Weise sie auch zu deren Besiz möegen gekommen seyn, wird hiedurch auf das schaerffste anbefohlen, dieselbigen innerhalb ZEHEN TAGEN dem Drucker dieser Nachricht einzuhändigen' Zu dem Gebrauch derer allerseitigen Eigenthums-Herrn:—Oder sie werden dem Profos gefänglich ueberlieffert und gestraffet werden als solche, die gestohlene Guether einnehmen und verhelen.

*Neu-York, den 27sten January, 1777.*

VON HEISTER.

Proclamation by Hessian commander for return of King's College and Society Library books, plundered from the City Hall (facsimile size). From Hugh Gaine's *The New-York Gazette*; and the *Weekly Mercury*, February 3, 1777. See pp. 97n1, 194-195.

Mercantile Library Association. As a result of his researches, he was led to recommend, as is advocated in



our own day,<sup>1</sup> the adoption of some scheme for a "union of interests" of the libraries in the city. This was not to mean the consolidation that had been so often sought between 1825 and 1840, but rather a complete differentiation or specialization, each institution being bound to perfect its collection in some one department.

By such an understanding "a more complete field for the labors of the scholar might be secured than the resources of any one library could ever hope to offer, and the value and usefulness of all be immeasurably increased." There already existed in the city certain special collections to illustrate this theory, viz., theological, medical and law libraries and, with equal truth, the treasures of the Historical Society. Furthermore, the arrangement would tend to diminish expense and losses incurred in purchasing duplicate works, "a serious consideration."

In descanting on the paucity and comparative poverty of American libraries, natural regret is expressed that "our historians and scholars have all been compelled to avail themselves of the resources of European libraries, or in like manner [with Gibbon] collect their own tools for literary labor." Nevertheless, in one respect there was cause for satisfaction: the recent examination of American private libraries by Dr. James Wynne and others had proved "gratifying as regards our own country, but more particularly so to us, as elevating to a higher rank the literary character of our city." The whole number of volumes in New York public libraries was then about 348,000, which, with an estimated total

<sup>1</sup> See article, "The Need for Specialized Libraries," by Dr. James H. Canfield, Librarian of Columbia Uni-

versity, in *The Independent*, Nov. 15, 1906.

of 270,000 in private collections, gave an aggregate of 618,000 volumes, or a ratio of about one to each inhabitant. By these statistics New York was shamefully outclassed by European cities, "much more so, in fact, than is consistent with our boasted intelligence."

Coming now to the pith of the argument for the support and specialization of local libraries, it is asserted that the Society Library, said to have been for years the "literary heart" of the city, was "emphatically the Family Library, sending its treasures to the fireside and the closet." As a literary heart, "its pulsations should be felt in every part of the public body." "Let this be the case," the appeal concludes, though in mixed metaphor, "let its circulation be healthful and active, and it too will fulfil its mission in sending light and knowledge into every quarter of our widely extended city."

At the time of its foundation, in 1754, the Society Library was denominated a "Public" Library in contradistinction to existing private or parochial collections. It was both a shareholders' or proprietary library and a subscription library, and practically identical in character with the "social" libraries, so common in New England just before and in the first half-century after the Revolution. Prior to 1850 the term "public" was never thought of as synonymous with the word "free," as is to-day the general acceptance.

Nevertheless, the free library movement of the early fifties, exemplified in the establishment of the Boston Public Library and in the noble Astor endowment for New York, would seem not merely to have caused the Trustees of the Society Library some uneasiness, but to have challenged them to explain their position. It should have been perfectly plain, however, that they

had no shadow of right to turn their institution into a free library, even had they been so disposed. In the annual report for 1858, accordingly, appears this declaration:

It has been objected that ours is not a public library, but private incorporation, and therefore not so much entitled to consideration as some of our sister institutions. It is true, that in the strictest sense of the term, it cannot be called a public or free library; nevertheless, in all its essential qualities, it is public in its character. The privileges of consultation and study are open to all upon the payment of a very small fee, and the Trustees have from time to time freely extended every facility in the loan of books and otherwise, where the application was deemed worthy.

The same report, moreover, in appealing for generous donations like the Demilt bequest, or such as the Boston Athenæum had often received, laid especial stress upon the need of a fund exclusively for the purchase of books, lest "the popularity of the Library sensibly decline." The desired "princely liberality" not forthcoming, it was voted, in June, 1859, that "all moneys hereafter received for free shares or for the commutation of annual dues" be invested as a permanent fund, the income of which fund, on its attaining to \$1000, should be applied to the purchase of books; by the spring of 1864 this fund had matured. Further in this connection the report for 1866 states that "the establishment has continued its ordinary course of long-sustained public usefulness. Its collections have been freely open to all persons engaged in any literary, scientific, or practical or legal researches, and those connected with the press, and the privilege has been largely used." It should be remarked here that during the greater part of this epoch



the sum of twenty-five cents was ordinarily charged, as an "examination" or "consultation" fee, to readers other than members or temporary subscribers.

At this juncture a few excerpts from the minute report of Librarian Grant of the Mercantile Library Association will prove pertinent and interesting, as showing the relative standing of New York libraries with some in Europe. These investigations were made in the spring and summer of 1855, the report appearing in print the following year.<sup>1</sup>

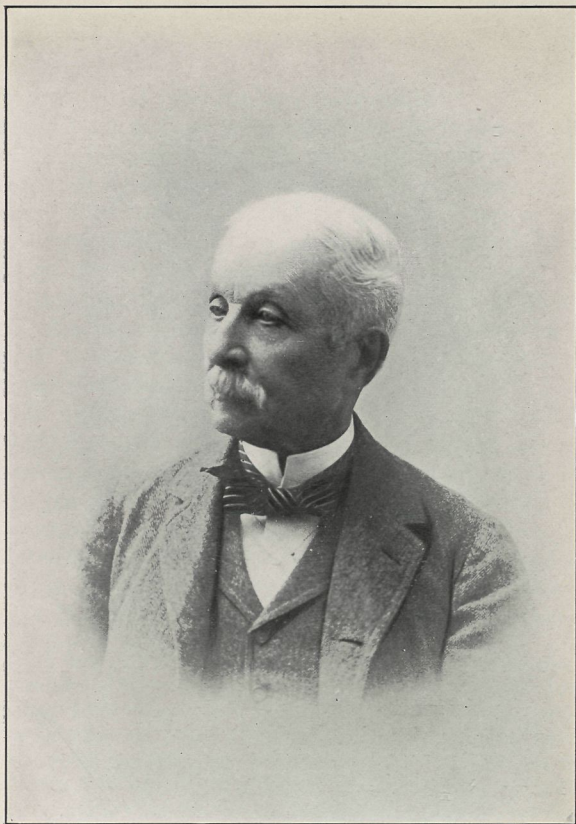
Mr. Grant observed that the "Free Library System" had "proved eminently successful," in the few years of its operation, especially in Liverpool and Manchester. The Liverpool Library, then a century old, was a circulating library of 43,000 volumes, with annual charges of £1, "and corresponds very much to the N. Y. Society Library." The Liverpool Athenæum, after which the defunct New York Athenæum had been modeled, in 1824,<sup>2</sup> was "very exclusive," with a yearly subscription of £2, its 21,000 volumes available for reference only.

In London, he says, "public or circulating libraries like our own are almost unknown," people having to depend upon booksellers, "of whom more than eighty let out works at rates varying from a penny per volume to a guinea per year." Again, "one looks in vain in Paris for the well organized circulating library. In its place he often sees, posted in a window, some of the more popular recent works, for hire at the rate of two or three sous a day." The Royal Library at Berlin, however, gave him "more satisfactory information concern-

<sup>1</sup> *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the Board of Direction of the Mercantile Library Association of the*

*City of New York.* May, 1856. Pp. 46-52.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 313 *et seq.*



Frederick Sheldon

Trustee, 1871-1907. Chairman, 1892-1894





ing the manner of conducting large institutions of this kind," its average of volumes loaned being about 40,000 a year.<sup>1</sup>

None could have scanned more carefully or gained more stimulus from this report than the friends of the Society Library. Certainly the Trustees did not relax a whit in their efforts to advance. In referring a few years later to the fact that the British Museum and other great libraries of the old world owed "a very large proportion of their literary treasures" to donations, and adding that those institutions were national property, the plea was offered that by "private liberality alone" could the Society Library hope "ever to rival the immense establishments of Europe."

In response to such appeals there were coming gradually some substantial accessions, besides the annual increase by gift and purchase, through individual generosity. A particularly noteworthy instance was the presentation, in the spring of 1868, by Robert Lenox Kennedy, of about 1850 volumes, or the greater part of the old Circulating Library of James Hammond of Newport, R. I. Of this collection the report for 1868 says:

It is a very curious memorial of the taste, manners, and lighter literature of the country from the period of 1783 until about or near 1830. Newport in those days was, as it still is, a resort during the warm season of the most refined, wealthy and cultivated society of the whole of this country; and this Circulating Library was long the chief resort of that society for lighter literature; for the valuable Redwood Public Library was then almost exclusively devoted to works of reference and authority.

This library contained the works of light reading at the time in most demand, including the numerous novels from the

<sup>1</sup> The circulation of the Society Library is given as 6238 in 1854; 6544 in 1855; 15,780 in 1857; 19,109 in 1862, and 32,642 in 1865.

then fashionable Minerva Press in London, most of which have now passed away and are forgotten, although a few of them are by authors, like Mrs. Radcliffe, of great power and originality. It also contains not a few original works by American authors, now rarely to be found, as well as others, equally scarce, by foreign authors who wrote on this country, or concerning our affairs, in those times.

The collection is also remarkable on another account, as showing the progress and mutation of the publishing business in this country, for many of the volumes were printed at places, most of them then small villages, from which, though those have now grown with the increase of the country in wealth and population, and afford large markets for the best literature, the publishing business has wholly died out, it being absorbed by our great cities.

At the same time with the acknowledgment of this unique donation, grateful mention was made of 331 "standard books of medical science, all of them of the best editions, and well bound," received from Oliver Bronson, M.D., long a shareholder, who had also previously given to the Library about a hundred works on physical science and in foreign literature.

Again, in 1873, Chairman de Peyster announced that his son, Major-General J. Watts de Peyster, had begun to fill an alcove with "books on special subjects," and that he himself had bestowed a set, complete in eighty-six folio volumes, of the "Indices of Conveyances, Judgments, Suits in Equity and Insolvent Assignments, recorded in the city of New York." These documents were received with appreciation and ordered placed in the de Peyster Alcove, to whose store these kindly benefactors regularly made additions, all of which were to be for reference only. By 1880 this collection had grown to include about 1000 volumes.

Another gift of note, comprising 112 volumes,<sup>1</sup> was received in 1874 from Mrs. J. R. Brodhead, the books being "a selection from the valuable library of her husband, the eminent historian of our State, whose long and faithful service to this Institution, as a member of its Board of Trustees and of its Library Committee, will ever be held in grateful recollection." A year later some seventy handsome volumes on Arctic explorations, in both English and French, giving full accounts of all such attempts from the earliest times, were presented by Mr. James Benkard. These books were also to be sequestered for consultation alone, the donor proposing to enlarge the collection when new publications on the subject should appear.

The report of 1879 announces a further proof of the intelligent devotion of Mr. Kennedy, who had just fitted up and decorated the "John C. Green Alcove" at his own expense. It was adorned with a bronze tablet, a clock and a stained window, and he added later a portrait of Mr. Green, by a noted Italian painter, Madrazo. For this alcove, as a nucleus of the present notable Green Art Collection, Mr. Kennedy had "purchased and deposited in the same a valuable and rare collection of books,<sup>2</sup> handsomely bound, upon art, architecture and kindred subjects, most of which are beautifully illustrated," all these gifts being made "as a memorial of his deceased friend," John C. Green.

In recognition of this splendid gift, which represented an intrinsic value of fully \$10,000, exclusive of the

<sup>1</sup> A list of these books appears in the Report for 1874, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> For the titles of this collection, numbering 415 volumes, see *A Classified Catalogue with Critical Notes of the Works on Art in the*

*Green Alcove of the New York Society Library selected and presented by Robert Lenox Kennedy.* New York, 1879. Privately printed. 48 pp. with index.



books, Mr. Kennedy was tendered a formal vote of thanks; and a covenant "of perpetual obligation" was drawn up by the board, under the terms of which these books were to be suitably labeled and preserved, and to be taken out only by express permission of the Trustees, while the alcove with its "furniture" was to be forever kept "in good order and complete repair."

As a further mark of honor and appreciation, both Mrs. Sarah H. Green and Mr. Kennedy were especially empowered, "during their lives, each to appoint ten persons who shall, during her or his pleasure, respectively have and enjoy all the privileges of the use of the Library in the same manner as members of the corporation"; and the Library Committee was also directed to "provide special cards of admission for the use of Mrs. Green and Mr. Kennedy."

Setting apart the Green Alcove had necessitated removing the Librarian's desk from its post of vantage opposite the staircase to "the east end of the Library room." This move had been proposed in November, 1875, on account of the currents of icy air that would sweep across the room, despite a partition having been ordered at the head of the stairs in December, 1868, "to protect the Library from cold during the winter." Matters such as heating and repairing the building, however, came under the province of the Library Committee, and do not find mention in the general minutes.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to limited wall space in the large hall, few decorations could be accommodated there. From time

<sup>1</sup> In this connection it is said that Dr. John G. Adams on a particularly bitter day deposited on the table a little bronze figure of an old woman bent and shivering with

exposure. This image adorned the reading room for many years, though its origin has long been obscure.

to time, however, various ornaments found their way into the building. In June, 1858, a picture of New Amsterdam in 1656, belonging to the St. Nicholas Society, was deposited in the Library. Again, in April, 1861, Samuel S. Osgood, the artist, was allowed, at his own risk and expense, to hang four of his paintings in the ladies' reading room, the subjects being "a Scripture piece, The Denial of Peter, An Italian Peasant Girl," and "portraits of Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Osgood." In January, 1879, Dr. John G. Adams was accorded a formal vote of thanks "for his gift of a bust of Caius Octavius Augustus, Emperor of Rome."

A notable embellishment of the large upper hall, now used as the reading room, was made in March, 1878, in a vote "to have the Arms of the Library painted on the wall above the front window at an expense not to exceed \$250." This decoration, a reproduction in heroic size of the second Maverick bookplate,<sup>1</sup> still meets one's up-turned eyes.

Not a few furnishings of the Library were given by interested friends. For instance, in June, 1857, a handsome chair was bestowed by the Hon. George Folsom; again, in June, 1874, came the "generous donation of a carpet for the ladies' room" from Richard E. Mount; and, in the following November, Chairman de Peyster presented a special set of chairs for that apartment, at the same time loaning a mirror, "while the room should be occupied as at present."

At times, however, the ladies' reading room and other apartments on the first floor were diverted from their original purposes and used for various objects. From 1859 to 1861 the suite on the south side of the hallway was

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 252, 484.

occupied by the Manhattan Life Insurance Company. Then for nearly a dozen years in one or both of these rooms were stored some private effects of the Misses Gelston. Also, for a number of years in the seventies, the "Genealogical Registry Board"—which translated meant Albert Welles, Esq., and his "College of American Heraldry"—flourished as the green bay tree; while across the hall were the headquarters of the New York Chess Association, conducted by John Treat Irving. Other temporary tenants were George Vandenhoff, the celebrated actor and dramatic reader, in 1864; the American Numismatic Society, in 1866–1867; the Peithologian Society, one of the oldest undergraduate organizations of Columbia College, in 1866; the Commissioners of Immigration, in 1869; the Trustees of Roosevelt Hospital, at odd times between 1869 and 1878; and, from 1872 until well into the eighties, Mr. Thomas Townsend was there hard at work on his unique history of the Civil War, as told by contemporary newspaper accounts.<sup>1</sup>

Situated as it was, only one block east of Fifth avenue and no further from Broadway, near Union square and but a short distance from Washington square, the Society Library building on University place was for years in the heart of the choice residential section of the city. New Yorkers of those days did not pass the greater part of the year "in the country." Private establishments were uniformly kept open the year round, members of families perhaps taking turns in vacation outings during the warm season. Old Knickerbocker customs still prevailed, such as neighborhood gatherings and informal visiting on the front "stoops" in the long summer even-

<sup>1</sup> This vast collection of clippings, now deposited in the Library of Columbia University, is known as the Townsend Library.

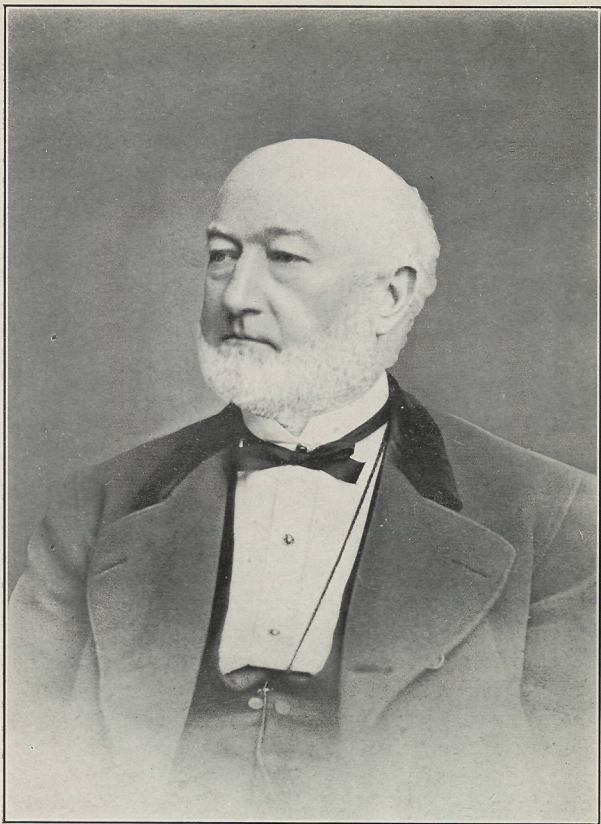


ings. So it was natural that the Library should have figured as a social rendezvous, as well as a Mecca for booklovers. What tales the patient old walls could tell of the numbers—of every type, from some of national fame to others of quiet repute as simple citizens—that here have passed their hours in reading or in exchanging views on topics of the day, whether literary, political, religious, or merely worldly.

Among the Library's frequenters were to be found college presidents and presidents of financial institutions alike, professional men of every calling, scientific investigators, men of letters and men of leisure, merchant princes and fashion's devotees, holders of high office,—all these, to say nothing of the galaxies of lovely, cultured and accomplished women, who found unfailing enjoyment, stimulus or solace among the treasures of the Library, especially in the trying days of the great war.

Space will permit the mention of only a few representative names. Among them we find Professor Charles Anthon of the Columbia faculty, renowned classical savant; William H. Appleton of the famous publishing house; Isaac Carow, banker, once a director of the old Athenæum, and a former president of the Chamber of Commerce, now honorably retired from the madding crowd, his name interesting also to-day as the grandfather of the present First Lady of the Land, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt; Joseph B. Collins, a prominent Quaker and one-time president of the United States Trust Co.; the Hon. Edward Cooper, son of the great philanthropist, mayor of New York; that handsome and distinguished editor, author and orator, George William Curtis; the Rev. Calvin Colton, D.D., noted clergyman

and writer; James F. de Peyster, president of the old Bank for Savings; the Hon. John A. Dix, Major-General and Governor; Commodore Henry Eagle, U. S. N.; Judge Francis W. Edmonds; John Ericsson, celebrated far and wide as the designer of that revolutionary craft, the *Monitor*; Isaac Ferris, chancellor of New York University; Isaac V. Fowler, postmaster of New York; Dr. John W. Francis, for years foremost exponent of the medical profession; Elbridge Gerry, socially prominent; the Goelet brothers, Peter and Robert, kings of commerce; Miss Henrietta B. Haines, principal of one of the noted "select schools for young ladies" of that age; Messrs. A. Gordon Hamersley and Louis C. Hamersley, popularly known as "Dombey and Son," as they paraded the streets in single file; D. Murray Hoffman, undisputed authority on ecclesiastical law; that distinguished artist, Daniel Huntington, long president of the National Academy of Design; Dr. John McVickar, a professor in both Columbia College and the General Seminary; the Rev. Dr. William A. Muhlenbergh, rector of the Church of the Holy Communion and a founder of St. Luke's Hospital; the clarion-voiced orator and reformer, Charles O'Connor, long the recognized head of the New York bar; Judge Charles A. Peabody; Edward Robinson, a scholar of enduring fame; James H. Roosevelt, founder of the great hospital that bears his family name; Alexander T. Stewart, one of the best-known retail merchants in history; John A. Weekes, a founder of the Union League Club;—but why continue? To satisfy the judgment of all on what names should be given, it would be necessary to repeat nearly the whole list. Let these suffice, then, to show the stamp of persons composing the pro-



Richard Edwards Mount

Trustee, 1873-1880. Treasurer, 1877-1880. Benefactor, 1880





prietors of the Society Library in the dark period covering the Civil War and its perplexing after-problems.

During these years, however, the membership roll, which, it may be recalled, had been so signally augmented in the spring of 1856 as to include 1218 names, became steadily impaired through the lapsing and forfeiture of many a share on which annual dues were payable. The acme of the Library's history was reached in 1857 with a total enrolment of 1255 rights. Although new subscriptions were received, averaging ten a year up to 1866, they could not offset the heavy inroads attributable to financial and political "causes, familiar to the public mind."

Referring to this tendency, the report for 1858 says: "While the actual interest of the shareholders in the property of the Library is increased by the forfeiture of shares, the Library is in fact rendered poorer, and its means of usefulness much abridged by the withholding of the dues upon them." Again, in the reports for 1862 and 1863, the board, while rejoicing that the "old and valued institution had continued in a period of difficulties and gloom to hold on its steady and unostentatious course as it had long done through years of alternate prosperity and adversity," at the same time hoped and trusted that the evidence so long given of the Library's "valued usefulness" would "soon awaken a more extensive and liberal patronage."

Nevertheless, the desired aid was not forthcoming; and when by 1865 the number of forfeitures had grown alarmingly large, the Trustees were forced to take some decisive measures. In November of that year the Library Committee reported "three ways in which a greater revenue can be got: by liberal donations in a

charitable subscription, by a considerable increase of members, and by an increase of annual payments." "A more independent mode of action" was preferable to the first of these; while a large influx of new members, sufficient for the purpose, would doubtless result in "some inconvenience to the present body of shareholders." The "only remaining method," then, was to raise the yearly dues, ten dollars being suggested, which price, "as a club rate—and the Shareholders form a literary club," would be "certainly a very moderate outlay."

Upon deliberation, then, and only after several shareholders' meetings, it was voted to seek legislative permission to raise the annual charge once more. Accordingly, despite stout opposition on the part of a few proprietors,—though with the frankest possible avowal by the board of its purpose and of the causes impelling thereto,—the state legislature passed, April 3, 1866, "An Act to Increase the Annual Payments on the Shares of the New York Society Library, and to Authorize the Trustees of the said Society to Commute their Annual Dues."

Subsequently, at the regular meeting of the corporation, this action of the Trustees and the proposed amendment were fully and freely discussed in the presence of a company that taxed to its utmost the seating capacity of the great hall. Mr. Richard Schell presided and announced, on the question's being put to vote, that the views and acts of the management had met with the endorsement of the shareholders. Furthermore, the entire old board was reëlected, these same fifteen gentlemen serving from 1862 to 1869. They at once convened and authorized the Treasurer to levy four dollars additional upon each share or right, the several classes of



stockholders therefore being assessed four, six and ten dollars a year, respectively. Also the price of shares was raised from \$100 to \$150, the commutation sums being fixed at \$50, \$75, and \$125, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Of the effect of these heroic measures, the report for 1867 says: "The augmentations were cheerfully complied with by most of the Stockholders," whereby the net income was nearly doubled; and, though "a few only of the Shareholders" had "hesitated or refused to pay the increased amount," the hope was confidently expressed that after studying "the causes and necessity of the augmentation" they would "see reason to withdraw all objection." Notwithstanding this great effort, the lapsing of shares continued, the list of members published in 1881 containing only 924 names.

As usual heretofore, the subject of shares now leads to a consideration of the general finances of the Library for this quarter-century. Harking back once more to the "sweeping change" of 1855, it appears that the initial move of that new-broom board was to call for a detailed report on "the financial condition of the corporation." Very promptly Treasurer Strong stated that the securities of the Library amounted to \$42,400, including a \$5000-bond and mortgage of William H. Appleton on the Broadway building, its payment contingent upon the remission of certain taxes.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the board undertook to raise \$2000 by "donations and subscriptions," each Trustee to be equipped with a book for the purpose. Mention of this soliciting and the success attending their exertions has already been made.<sup>3</sup>

No arts of rhetoric can more eloquently display the results of these efforts than the simple figures them-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 359, 410.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 423, 426.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 448.

selves, which show for 1855-1856 a balance of nearly \$700, as against a deficit of over \$450 the year before, or, in a word, an actual gain of \$1150 in net receipts. The total inventory then taken of the property, books excepted, amounted to \$73,395.68.

By November, 1856, the question of back taxes having been settled by compromise with the city comptroller,<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Appleton having paid over the specified sum of \$2532.78, the Treasurer took "great pleasure in reporting the Institution to be (for probably the first time in twenty years, while occupying its own premises) **free from debt.**" This was but a modest claim, however, as further study would have shown him that *sixty* years would be nearer the truth, or in fact ever since the completion of the Nassau Street building in 1795. So the next annual report, in announcing the new edifice as "entirely completed and paid for," rejoices over the passing of the "dark era" and the prospects of "a bright future," and proclaims in letters big with elation that "**THE CORPORATION DID NOT OWE A DOLLAR.**" And this happy state, despite wide-spread declines in the money market and distractions of war-time, has continued unbroken to the present day, when fortunately the likelihood of any return to former conditions is increasingly remote.

Yet prosperity did not come by leaps and bounds. The great panic of 1857, it is needless to say, did not noticeably "recruit the finances" of the Library, though the report for 1858 was glad to state that "the blighting effects of the commercial tornado" were "fast disappearing." For some years thereafter the Library continued to be "much crippled in its means of usefulness by the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 426.

scantiness of its income,"<sup>1</sup> and the Trustees continued to deplore that "the property and income, and the literary resources of this venerable institution" were "by no means commensurate with the wealth and magnitude of the city, nor with the means of intellectual instruction and gratification"<sup>2</sup> thus offered.

During the "gloom and difficulties" of the Civil War, the Library did little more than to exist in "quiet and unpretending continuance in ministering to the gratification and improvement of a numerous class of citizens."<sup>3</sup> But, peace not bringing the desired relief, and in order to offset the "comparative decrease in the pecuniary resources of the Institution, growing out of the depreciation of money and consequent universal rise of prices,"<sup>4</sup> it was then that steps were taken for betterment, resulting in raising the annual payment charge in 1866, as narrated above. By this means a revenue of \$9420 was gained in 1866-1867, in contrast to \$5043, the year before; and the next year it was over \$200 more.

But again there fell a sullen hush on the expected enthusiasm. So, as often before, the board had to resort in 1874 to the appointment of a special committee on "increasing the means and usefulness of the Library." Chairman de Peyster, Treasurer Swan and Richard E. Mount, so delegated, drew up a circular, which, though approved, was not then printed, owing to "the universal prostration of business at that time (June, 1874)." Finally, in December, 1875, this circular to the public, as also a briefer notice to shareholders, was published by the same committee, in conjunction with

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 1859, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report, 1861, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Annual Report, 1865, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Annual Report, 1866, p. 3.





Third bookplate of the Society Library, engraved by Maverick in 1797 (facsimile size). See pp. 252, 475.

Messrs. J. G. Adams, F. A. Stout and R. T. Auchmuty, a delegation from the members at large.

The next item to chronicle is one of those sad occurrences so much pleasanter to leave unrecorded; but as it has already appeared in print, it must be mentioned here, though with reluctance. The fact itself is set forth thus tersely and cuttingly in the report for 1877: "The late Treasurer has absconded and rendered no account." Little further information is gleaned from the minutes: on January 13th Mr. Swan had been unanimously "displaced" from the treasurership, for having "neglected the duties of his office," "disappeared from the city," and, "as believed, appropriated to his own use the funds of this corporation." The sum of money thus lost was the commutation fund, already described, which by that time had risen to about \$3000.<sup>1</sup> It was never restored; but again learning a lesson, as in the Harison case in 1842-1846, the board at once established a Finance Committee, to consist of the Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer, to control the permanent fund and all investments.

Turning hastily from this untoward episode, we are to be greeted with some very gratifying intelligence indeed, and on the same page that bore the bad news. In brief it is that the long financial drouth, unbroken since the generous Demilt remembrance in 1850, had at last come to an end through the receipt of two handsome gifts. The first of these was a bequest of \$5000 from the estate of George B. Dorr of Boston, long a member of the Library. According to the terms of his will, the sum was to be only \$3000, unless \$45,000 additional should be subscribed within six months after

<sup>1</sup> See p. 469.

probating his will. There seemed little prospect of such a windfall, however, until just before the time-limit was to expire, when the astounded board was notified, in March, 1877, of "a munificent donation" of \$50,000 from Caleb S. Green and Charles E. Green, residuary legatees under the will of the late John C. Green, through his widow, Mrs. Sarah H. Green, thus securing to the institution the whole Dorr bequest.

Overjoyed at this unlooked-for benefaction, which far transcended their fondest dreams, and which in all was more than double the noted Bromfield gift to the Boston Athenæum in 1846,—an instance of intelligent generosity repeatedly brought forward as a precedent by successive appeals in behalf of the Library,—the Trustees at once returned suitable thanks and ordered the new funds to be deposited in the National Bank of Commerce, their investment to be subject to the direction of Robert Lenox Kennedy, to whom they extended a hearty appreciation of "the munificent result of his zealous efforts in procuring . . . the donation just received." Soon afterward the "*free use of the Library*" during their respective lifetimes was tendered to Mrs. Green and to the Messrs. Green.

In deference to the expressed wishes of Mrs. Green, a special by-law, recommended by Messrs. Kennedy, Nash and Drisler, was passed in June, entitled "Of the John C. Green Fund," in brief as follows:

1. That the said endowment of \$50,000 be forever "kept invested in such interest-bearing securities as are allowed by law for the investment of trust funds," and not to be used "in the purchase of lands, or the construction or repair of buildings"; the said fund to be kept invested by itself and its "condition" to be given in the Treasurer's yearly report.



2. The net income thereof to be "applied to the purchase and binding of books," each book to be labeled or stamped, "Purchased from the income of the John C. Green endowment."

3. "The alcove in the library-room fronting the entrance from the stairs" to be set apart for these books with "a bust or portrait of Mr. Green," and to "be designated the John C. Green Alcove."

4. One half of the income of the fund to be applied to "the purchase and binding of works relating to the Fine Arts," and not to be loaned save to Mrs. Green; "the residue of said income to be applied to the purchase and binding of books of General Literature, excluding, however, all works of prose fiction."

5. The annual report to contain a list of books bought from this income.

6. This by-law, "in the nature of an agreement with the donors," to be "of perpetual obligation."

Such was the noble foundation of the Green Art Collection of the Society Library, an endowment that has brought prestige not alone to the institution but to the great city of New York as well. After the lapse of a full generation it stands to-day, as it will stand for all time, a monument indeed more enduring than bronze or marble to the enlightened philanthropy of its founders. Honor is due also in no slight degree to those gentlemen whose cultivated judgment and unwearied devotion have been so freely offered year by year in its further enrichment. As has already been said, the nucleus of this collection, as also the elegant decoration of the alcove, was the princely gift of Robert Lenox Kennedy, in memory of his friend Mr. Green.

John Cleve Green, a great-grandson of the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson, first president of the College of New Jersey, was for years a well-known and prosperous figure of the old China trade, and director in manifold

financial, railway and charitable organizations. He left a fortune of over four millions to "the cause of Christian education," a large portion of which served to endow the school of science at Princeton and the celebrated academy at Lawrenceville, N. J., his birthplace. His wife, Sarah H. Griswold, was a daughter of George Griswold, one of the noble "old merchants" of New York, whose counting-house Mr. Green had entered as a youth.

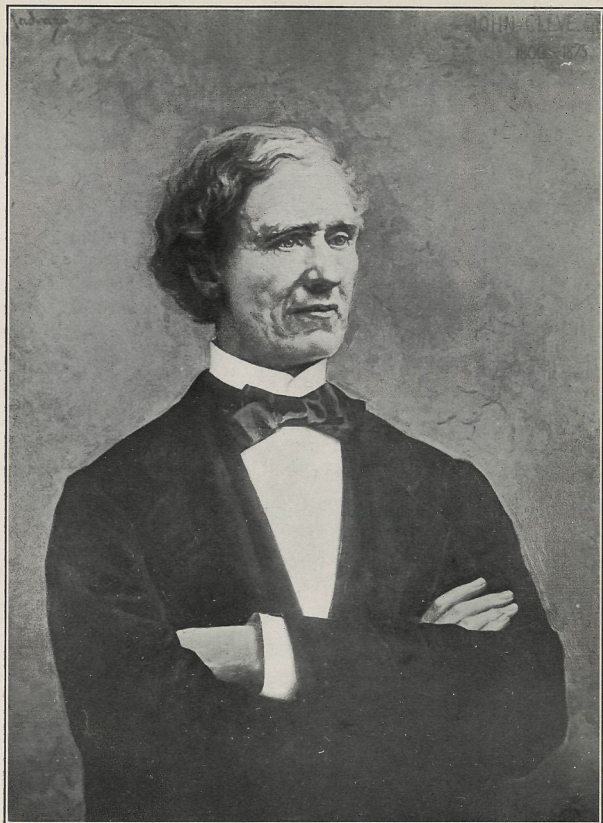
Closely following these legacies came a third bequest, \$3000 from the estate of George J. Foster. This sum was received in April, 1878, with no less satisfaction for its being somewhat overshadowed in amount by the previous donations. Like them it was at once invested in bond and mortgage, its income alone to be used in the purchase of books.

The quarter-century ending with April, 1879, therefore, left the Library in by far the most prosperous state in its history hitherto. The value of its property on University place (books excepted) was then estimated at \$130,000,—the insurance on the building being \$44,000, with \$46,000 on the books,—while in addition the total gift funds of \$58,000 were securely invested in "improved property in the city of New York worth double that amount." Consequently it was wholly proper for the Trustees to "feel themselves authorized to congratulate the Shareholders on the general state of the trust committed to their charge, and the great improvement of the establishment during the past year"<sup>1</sup>; and, for the future, to hope "that the friends of the Library will not remit their endeavors to increase the fund for the purchase of books."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter cannot be concluded without chronicling

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 1878, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report, 1879, p. 4.



John Cleve Green

from whose estate were founded the Green Art Alcoves, 1877





two events of deep significance in the history of the Society Library. On the 18th of March, 1870, its venerable Chairman, the Hon. Gulian Crommelin Verplanck, died in the eighty-fourth year of his age, nearly sixty years since his first election to the board, at whose councils he had sat or presided for almost all that space of time. Besides the resolutions of respect and sorrow, the annual report of 1870 devotes several pages to a contemplation of "the rare excellence" of the deceased, in whose mind "were stored vast treasures of diversified learning, the lore of antiquity, and the sources and character of the progress of modern times in science, literature and art"; and adds:

Other societies and institutions, religious, charitable, literary, and social, have united in similar tokens and estimates of his great worth and useful services. His name and merits were widely known and highly appreciated. Deeply is this loss felt in the community, which he represented on the floor of Congress, of the Legislature of this, his native State, and in the departments and other situations in which he held official prominence and gained merited distinction. He was a public man, and attained to "the popularity that follows—not that which is run after."

It is fitting to close this chapter with a brief account of the "Centennial Celebration" of the Library's incorporation, the first demonstration of a commemorative character in its history. In accordance with plans of the committee, Evert A. Duyckinck, Dr. Thomas Ward, Frederic de Peyster, William J. Hoppin, Charles R. Swords and George H. Moore, appropriate exercises were held in "the Hall of the New York Historical Society," Second avenue and Eleventh street, on the evening of November 9, 1872.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See card of invitation, preserved in the Library Scrap-Book.

Chairman de Peyster presided, and, after an invocation by the Rev. Dr. John Cotton Smith, rector of the Church of the Ascension, gave a very interesting and informing résumé of social conditions prevailing in the city in 1700, the date so long claimed for the founding of the Society Library.<sup>1</sup>

Next in order came the "Centennial Address"<sup>2</sup> by Dr. Thomas Ward, a discourse, which, though highly entertaining for play of fancy, was very discursive, as if the speaker felt impelled to present a wider range of topics than time would permit more than superficially to mention. In swift succession there swept past his hearers' mental vision the great libraries of history, from earliest days, culminating in a hasty glance at New York institutions, of which the Society Library, until 1820, "stood alone to bear the brunt of all demands made by all classes of the country." In tracing its history, emphasis was laid on its having received but one pecuniary donation in all its century and more of public service.

Brief observations then followed with bewildering rapidity on the world outlook in contemporary politics, in professional advancement, in literature, the arts and science, and particularly in mechanical inventions. In conclusion the optimistic speaker saw the Library a century hence, "permanently established in some beauti-

<sup>1</sup> This address seems never to have been printed, despite a direction to that effect by the board; at any rate, no copy is known to exist. Reports show it was uncommonly advanced in both information and deduction, —though perpetuating old errors,—especially in view of meager sources available. See the *Evening Post*, Nov. 11, 1872; also *Public Libraries in the United States*. Washington,

1876. Part I, chapter xxxviii, "Public Libraries of Ten Principal Cities"; §vii, "Public Libraries of New York City," by O. C. Gardner. Vol. II, pp. 919–920.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Ward, M.D. *Address delivered before the New York Society Library on the One Hundredth Anniversary of its Incorporation, November 9th, 1872*. New York, 1872.



ful portion of our upper island, . . . in an elegant and commodious edifice, with a spacious reading-room opening upon a charming parterre of flowers, enriched with fountains and statuary; with a noble library of 200,000 volumes; with a list of 3000 shareholders."

## X

1879-1904

“**T**HE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY,” writes a devoted student of local history in 1880, “is the rarest and richest, as well as the earliest, loan library in America.”<sup>1</sup> Although in this present study the institution heartily disavows for itself any such absolute claim as the last, and can scarcely assent to the former statements; it yet does subscribe to the further assertion, that it then contained “about 70,000 volumes, comprising a great number out of print, and not to be found in modern or antiquarian bookstores.” True also is the same writer’s concluding characterization, that “from its inception down to the present time, this library has been the resort, pre-eminently, of the families of wealth and social position; and its founders and early members are still represented by their descendants.” In a similar strain the annual report of 1870 had said:

This is not a library to which the laboring classes readily have access. Its locality, its constitution and its associations have tended to confine it to the wealthier portion of society. This

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Martha J. Lamb. *History of the City of New York*. New York, 1880. Vol. II, p. 716.

has been the result rather of circumstances than of any deliberate intention. This institution partakes more of a private and social character than those great public institutions whose object it is to throw open the treasures of literature and science to every class in the community.

Again, in 1871, the Trustees—alluding to “the fact that it is not a circulating library thrown open to the public, and that a right to its privileges is secured only by the payment of a stipulated sum, tends to circumscribe its operations and impede its increase”—observed, however, that “this very feature in this library secures a more discriminating selection of books than in libraries which have a more promiscuous circulation.” Furthermore, in syllogistic reasoning, “the Society Library is exercising its influence among the more highly educated and reflecting classes,” from which proceed the influences that determine “the character of our civilization.”

So much, therefore, in explanation of the Society Library in this modern age of the omnipresent Free Public Library. It now remains to carry the narrative to the spring of 1904, when the venerable and sturdy old institution rounded out a full century-and-a-half of historic life.

At a glance it is observable how few new names appear on the board of Trustees for this sixth and concluding quarter-century. Besides the fifteen who held over from the previous period, only twenty-one other gentlemen were called to participate in the Library's management, or at a rate of less than one a year. Long terms of service have thus been the rule of late years. To give a few examples: the average tenure of the old board of 1879–1880 was over twenty years; the three trusteeships of less than eight years' duration ended



only with death,—as also six others of far greater extent,—the high average being attained chiefly through the forty-two-year term of Charles E. Strong and that of Frederick Sheldon, elected in 1871 and only recently deceased; Frederic J. de Peyster was a member of the board for a little over thirty years; while, in the case of his uncle, Frederic de Peyster, Trustee from 1840 to 1855 and from 1869 to 1882, more than forty-two years covered the time between his first election and his removal by death. A still longer span of nearly fifty-two years comprehends the four distinct terms of Stephen C. Williams, though aggregating only about twenty years of actual service in all.

Within this space of twenty-five years, furthermore, the council board had been little visited with the old-time spectre of a contested election, followed by a possible overturn. In 1881, and again in 1882, an opposition ticket was put into the field, but none of its nominees—save for the eight names which in the former year were on both lists—received above forty-six votes, to the eighty-seven cast as the lowest number on the “regular” ballot.

There is little to record in the procedure at board meetings. Excuses for past failures to attend, as also for expected absences to come, have been for the most part scrupulously presented and acted upon. In December, 1903, however, it became needful to call attention to the by-law that unexplained absence at three consecutive meetings created a vacancy. For many years, when a quorum has not been found, it has been customary for those present to transact the business of the moment, trusting to the next full meeting to have their action ratified.

With the death of Chairman Frederic de Peyster in August, 1882, it became the practice to have a minute prepared on the character and services of Trustees who died in office, such memorial to be entered on the records, engrossed for the family of the deceased, and often separately printed besides. From some of these it is meet to quote in part at least. Formal and conventional as the language may sound, it yet voices sincere appreciation of these men who gave so liberally of time and talents to the cause of the Society Library.

In the case of the Hon. Frederic de Peyster, LL.D., descended from the Scotch nobility, as from a notable Dutch ancestry, his associates could "refrain from mentioning the long list of offices and honors to which he was elected by leading financial and charitable institutions desiring the benefit of his legal acquirements, hereditary honesty and good sense in all things." But they must "allude" to "the industry and ability which were to constitute him a worthy descendant of his distinguished ancestors, and were to cause his co-operation and his counsel to be desired and sought where literature was cultivated and good deeds encouraged"; for, "living in an age almost unexampled for its personal impeachments, he stood steadfast for the right and unassailed." They gratefully recalled "his unfailing cheerfulness and courtly courtesy," as also his "almost affectionate interest in the affairs of the Library," and his "legitimate and delightful pride in its increasing prosperity and usefulness."

Robert Lenox Kennedy, who was unanimously chosen to succeed Mr. de Peyster as Chairman, has been mentioned often in these pages as one of the most disinterested of the Library's benefactors. A notable figure in

financial and social circles of the city, he was no less influential in the advancement of culture and good works. At his death in 1887, after a trusteeship of more than thirty-one years, his colleagues paid him deserved tribute as "one of the most useful and honored trustees of this institution, ever showing his attachment to it by acts of generous liberality." In acknowledging his instrumentality in securing the Green endowment, to which he had "made contributions from time to time from his own means," the minute lauds "his exquisite taste in art," which "made him a most serviceable counsellor in the selection of works in that department." Finally, "as an expression of the sense of their great loss, which they share with so many of the religious, charitable and literary institutions of the city," the Trustees paid respect to "his integrity of character, uniform courtesy of manner and considerate regard for the feelings of others," as also to "his extreme modesty."

Since the death of Frederic de Peyster, the chairmanship has been held also by Messrs. Strong, Sheldon, Drisler, Knox, F. J. de Peyster, Baldwin, J. L. de Peyster, King, Curtis, Schermerhorn and Foster, somewhat in rotation, for terms of not more than four years in length.

Omitting, in deference to convention, all mention of present Trustees, brief and respectful attention is due those members of the board whose terms fell wholly within this period. For ten years the "good sense and sound judgment" of James M. McLean, a man of the business world, "were ever at the service of the institution," says the tribute to his memory; Henry A. Cram, a lawyer by profession, was renowned as an art lover and critic, whose accomplishments made him especially valuable in the management of the Green Alcove, which his



personal gifts further enriched; John A. Hardenbergh, a successful merchant, had served on the board for seven years, and as Treasurer for four, at the time of his death; the "cultivated mind and varied and extensive reading" of Alfred Pell "had given him a knowledge of books and an appreciation of what is needed in carrying out the objects of an association such as this"; Albert Mathews, a lawyer, eminent at the bar and ever firm and courageous in his adherence to principle, was a Trustee for over fifteen years; Col. Johnston L. de Peyster, grandson of Frederic de Peyster, conspicuous for gallantry in the Civil War, served the Library for twenty years, ever showing "a warm interest in and a zealous unselfish devotion to its welfare"; lastly, for a brief period, the name of R. Fulton Cutting, Esq., a gentleman well known for his zeal in civic betterment, appears upon the roll of Trustees.

The time for stated Trustee meetings continued as last recorded until April, 1884, when it was changed from eight o'clock to eight-thirty, the same evening being retained. Again, in April, 1906, a return was made to long-ago custom in setting the hour at half-past five in the afternoon, the date amended to read the *second* Wednesday of the regular months. Special meetings, however, have been called at various hours and at places other than the Library building; for example, in 1899 several such were held at the office of Mr. King, at 80 Broadway, chiefly concerning the Contoit legacy.

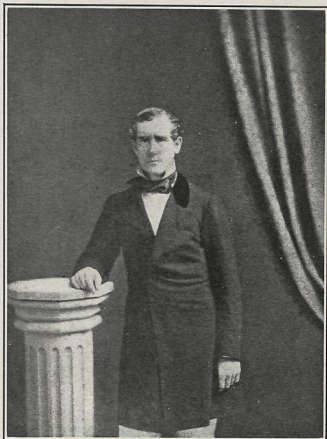
No further change in the number of the Trustees has been proposed since 1841, when fifteen were first elected instead of twelve. In 1881 a movement was on foot for an amendment to the charter, whereby but five of the board should be chosen each year, thus insuring a term

of three years at least to each Trustee. But at the annual meeting of that year the proposition was lost, though how decisively the records do not tell. Great interest seems to have been manifested in the question, for 127 shares were represented at the gathering, with an opposition ticket in the field. Nothing daunted, the promoters of the plan carried the matter before the legislature, and a bill to that effect passed the assembly in March, 1882.

It appears that most of the Trustees themselves were bitterly set against the project, for early in April the officers of the board were "instructed to make such representation in opposition as they should deem expedient." A few days later, "by invitation," General J. Watts de Peyster came before the Trustees and "made some remarks in regard to the purport of the bill," which he had been strongly advocating for several years, perhaps in behalf of his father, Chairman Frederic de Peyster. It was thereupon voted to protest to the governor and the legislature against the passage of the bill, "in any shape whatever"; while at the same time "the propriety of sending out circulars to the shareholders inviting their presence at the approaching annual election was suggested." Efforts of the revisionists were once more ineffectual, both their platform and ticket again meeting with defeat at the annual meeting. The bill, after a seemingly promising career in the senate, was finally lost to sight in May, upon its return to the committee on municipal corporations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In March, 1904, the project was revived by the board itself, in a discussion "whether the terms of office of the Trustees could not be so arranged that the terms of only five

should expire each year"; but upon Treasurer Foster's reporting it to be possible only through a legislative amendment, the matter was deemed "not now desirable."



George J. Foster

Benefactor, 1878





Throughout this epoch the annual meetings of the corporation—of which a notification is sent to each member by postal card—have come to be rather tame and perfunctory affairs, with the two exceptions in 1881 and 1882, just mentioned. Since 1884 the number of shareholders present has not reached thirty, while the average for the past decade has been about a dozen votes only. This does not mean careless indifference, however, but rather implicit confidence in the management on the part of the members. Owing to this feeling, as well as to the lack of numbers, these gatherings have come to assume an informal, genial character, enlivened by not a few pleasantries.

For example, the meeting on April 24, 1906, called to order by Mr. Baldwin, was composed of eleven shareholders—including one lady—and one outsider. As for many years before, Mr. Edward F. Brown was chosen temporary chairman and Mr. Henry E. Gregory, secretary. The chairman remarked that as the annual report of the Trustees had been handed in printed form to those present, it would be unnecessary to have it read. At this a member sprang to his feet and moved that the secretary be requested to read the report, for pray why, otherwise, was there any need of that functionary! The motion was carried, and all followed the reading of the annual statement with open texts, greeting its conclusion with vociferous applause. As there seemed to be no particular business to be considered, the presiding officer took occasion to speak feelingly of his life-long devotion to the Library, observing that he had kept one of its books on his desk for over thirty years. "What book is that?" demanded another member, exclaiming, "Fine him! Fine him!" to the general merriment. Chair-

man King then made some remarks on the increased usefulness of the institution, "as the Society Library grows old—or older, rather," he corrected. Upon request, Mr. Baldwin, chairman of the Library Committee, told of the labors and achievements of that coterie of gentlemen, his statements being received with a chorus of "Hear! Hear!" from a few lusty-throated shareholders, led by Treasurer Foster. Upon announcement by the tellers of the unanimous reëlection of the old board, fourteen ballots having been cast, Chairman King, on the point of adjournment, moved a vote of thanks to the inspectors, to the chairman of the meeting and especially to the secretary, "for his admirable reading of the annual report, which displayed linguistic attainments of a high order in rendering the titles of foreign publications."

In 1880 the shareholders' meeting was held at eight o'clock instead of seven-thirty, the polling-hour being correspondingly altered to read from half-past eight to half-past nine. Since 1902, however, the business meeting of the corporation has been called at eight-thirty o'clock, the poll to be open from nine to nine-thirty. On one occasion, in 1889, the board went so far as to direct that the annual meeting and election be held on Thursday evening, May 2d, inasmuch as the legislature had appointed Tuesday, April 30th, a public holiday, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of General Washington's inauguration as President of the United States. Upon second thoughts they must have realized the illegality of their action, for the election was held on the date fixed by the charter, twenty ballots being cast.

Needless to say, these elections and meetings have been regularly conducted in the University Place build-



ing, the third home of the Society Library, and the one it has longest occupied. But how different to-day are its surroundings! At its erection it was well up-town; now it is "way down-town." Almost with the swiftness of time itself the hastening city has been advancing and spreading over the island's pastures, woodlands and fastnesses alike, and even more relentlessly sweeping into oblivion cherished landmarks of earlier times. So continuous is this spirit of demolition that scarcely a portion of the old town can be said to have an enduring character nowadays.

Long before, Broadway had been given over to business houses, just as Fifth avenue has for some years, to a point far above Thirteenth street. Offices and retail establishments now reign supreme in University place, and steadily strengthen their foothold among the countless boarding-houses in the numbered streets east and west. Those who passed infancy and youth in this once aristocratic neighborhood, scampering over the brown-stone steps of the Society Library in saucy defiance of Trustees and crusty old janitor, have long since been forced, like their fathers before them, to sell their homes and quietly steal away, knowing full well a similar fate to lie in store for their children. The Library building, with the stately Schermerhorn mansion by its side in a loyal comradeship of over fifty years, still maintains its quiet dignity amidst all change of scene, though it receives but scant notice from the hurrying throngs on business bent. At night, save for the single occasion of the annual meeting, it stands lost in darkness and deep silence where once the gaiety and brightness of social interchange were all-prevailing.

It must not be thought, however, that the Library's

persistent clinging to its long-wonted site has been due merely to sentimental attachment. No such spirit has ever deterred its Trustees in the past from making an advantageous move, nor will the present management be found less reluctant, when the opportunity shall come. Indeed the question has often been discussed and acted upon. For example, in March, 1892, the board declined an offer of \$100,000 for the property, deeming the sum insufficient to establish the institution fittingly elsewhere. Also, late in 1893, other negotiations met with a similar fate, for the Trustees have been unwilling to run the risk of an indebtedness such as had formerly retarded progress for so many years. According to the report for 1894, they were "not unmindful of the advantages of moving the Library to a situation farther up town, whenever such a change becomes practicable." Two years later they were facing "with increasing seriousness [the problem] of either a removal up town, or of the establishment of a branch or branches in the upper part of the city."

In the meantime an offer of \$175,000 had been declined in 1895, owing to the original conditions of agreement on acquiring the lots. In April, 1897, Chairman Baldwin and Messrs. J. L. de Peyster, Sheldon and Schermerhorn were asked to take up "the matter of a new site for the Library, the purchase of the same, and also the sale of the present building and site." At the next meeting, in May, the removal of the Library and the purchase of the Berkeley Lyceum in West Forty-fourth street "were discussed generally," but "indefinitely postponed." Then for the first time mention was made of a proposition to have the Society Library unite with the New York Public Library system, the sugges-

tion of its "desirability" having come to Mr. Haight from George L. Rives, Esq. Of this proposition Johnston L. de Peyster declared that he and his family and friends would "vigorously oppose amalgamation, preferring to die a natural death to strangulation."<sup>1</sup> The

*To The most Reverend Fathers in God the Arch Bishops, To the Right Reverend the Bishops, To The Reverend the Clergy. And to all the Learned and pious - Patrons and Promoters of Piety and Learning in the Kingdom of Great Brittain*

*This following Proposal as a means of its Advancement in the Province of New York and other parts of America*

*Is most humbly dedicated and with most profound Respect and Deference to their Godly - Wisdom, is intirely Submitted by,*

*Their most faithfull Servant and fellow-Labourer in Christ Jesus our Lord and Master*



*London July 11<sup>th</sup> 1713*

*John Sharpe  
Chaplain to her Majestys Garrison  
in the province of New York*

Dedication page of Sharpe Proposals (reduced), now in Bodleian Library, Oxford. See p. 57.

<sup>1</sup> Oddly enough, eighteen years before, at the shareholders' meeting in April, 1879, Col. de Peyster (not then a Trustee) had himself pro-

posed that the legislature be asked "to reorganize the Society Library as a Free Library, to be supported by endowment similar to the Boston



committee was discharged "with thanks," in December, 1898.

At the same time, however, a long discussion took place over removal and a suitable location, Mr. Baldwin stating that "the insuperable obstacles to moving were lack of money and the disposition of the present site." The Berkeley Lyceum was again recommended, as also "the old Columbia College Library" in Forty-ninth street near Madison avenue. But a second committee, Messrs. Sheldon, King, Russell, Foster and Baldwin, after a single report of "progress," was discharged at its own request, in March, 1899, the Library "for financial reasons being unable to purchase," and "a pause in the direction of moving . . . imperatively enforced."

The subject continued to receive attention, however, for in October, 1899, there came an offer of \$125,000, on which no decision was made; and in April, 1901, Treasurer Foster reported "an offer of \$154,000 and an intimation that possibly \$175,000 would be offered, if less would not be accepted." Again no action followed, the proposition having been found impracticable. Latterly there has been adopted the Fabian policy of waiting and hoping, the Trustees and other friends of the institution simply biding their time for the right opportunity, and the assurance of adequate funds. Meanwhile, the inconvenience of the present location is not a little mitigated by the telephone service and by the free messenger system maintained by the Library.

In this connection there is something further to be

Public Library." Action was indefinitely postponed, however, on the prompt and significant amendment of Mr. Richard Schell, "that, when the People of the City of New York

donate to the Society Library \$250,000, we recommend the Trustees take into consideration the propriety of converting this Society into a Free Library."

said about "amalgamation" with the Public Library system, several times proposed, but always outside the board. For instance, in January, 1898, Mr. Baldwin was approached by Andrew H. Green, Esq., with that end in view. His letter was laid on the table "for the present," while Messrs. King and J. L. de Peyster undertook "to consider the whole question of the future of the Library." Nothing definite resulted, however. Again, in December, 1900, Messrs. Sheldon, Foster and Marshall were named to investigate "the desirability of consolidation" with the New York Public Library; but eventually, in February, 1901, the measure was deemed "not best for the interest of the Society Library." Opposition to any such move was two-fold. Not only was there a strong feeling of pride in inherited proprietorship to be encountered among the members of the Library, but there were, furthermore, grave legal obstacles in the way of a union with any other institution. The rights of its shareholders were explicitly safeguarded in the ancient charter, and it was very doubtful whether the Trustees, or even a majority of the members themselves, could in any way divest other members of the complete ownership of their shares in the property of the Library.

Notwithstanding its willingness to remove at short notice, there has been no disposition on the part of the board to relax in due attention to the building itself. In fact so important has the proper supervision of the edifice become, that in May, 1883, a by-law was passed, creating a House Committee to "have the management and control of the Library building and the grounds connected therewith." At first comprising two, and since 1886 three, members, for some years regularly

designated by the Chairman at the opening of each fiscal year, but since 1899 "appointed by ballot," this committee has so grown in usefulness and responsibility as to have taken over several functions formerly exercised by the Library Committee, even to the appointment of a Librarian and the regulation of his salary. For four years, from 1886 to 1890, its membership was identical with that of the Finance Committee. Long terms of service have characterized its history, Mr. Auchmuty serving for eleven years and Mr. King for more than sixteen, while of its present incumbents Mr. Haight was first appointed in 1898 and Mr. Schermerhorn in 1894. At the time the committee was established, Mr. Auchmuty, appointed its first chairman, was tendered a vote of thanks "for his gratuitous services in an unofficial capacity."

Noteworthy changes in the familiar old structure have been caused by the growth of the Green Art Collection. In 1884 a portion of its income was devoted, with the approval of the donor, to fitting out the alcove next adjoining on the east, in a manner consistent with the original compartment; and a fine plate-glass window was provided in 1889. Still a third alcove, west of the others, received a finish uniform therewith in 1901, the additional equipment having been demanded by the growth of the department.

Another new departure was the removal of the current periodicals and newspapers up-stairs into the large hall, the erection of a towering office building in the rear of the Library in 1896 shutting out daylight rather effectually from the old reading room. That apartment has since been used as a repository for government documents and files of old newspapers, formerly of



necessity stored in the basement "in dangerous proximity to the furnaces." Other alterations, aside from ordinary repairs and improvements, have been the prohibition of smoking in any part of the building since 1881, the exclusion of dogs for the past decade, and the introduction of two indispensable agents of progress—the telephone, in 1899, and electric lighting, early in 1901.

It should be mentioned here that after a lapse of over thirty years the Library building was again placed on the city tax list for the year 1887. But, thanks to the intelligent energy of George V. N. Baldwin, the land and premises were relieved from the assessment and from all future taxation, and a refund was made of the sum paid under protest. For these signal services Mr. Baldwin was presented with a free share in the Library.

As in the past, so also during this last epoch, arrangements have been made from time to time with certain individuals engaged in literary pursuits or with patriotic societies for temporary accommodation among the alcoves or in vacant apartments on the first floor. For example, the Society of the Cincinnati, which had been authorized in 1877 to fit up an alcove at its own expense, was further allowed, in January, 1882, "to place their safe in the reading room." Again, in April, 1883, Thomas S. Townsend received permission "to deposit his work on the Rebellion in one of the rooms of the Library." The front room at the left of the entrance, known as the Ladies' Room all along, was in May, 1892, cut in two, the inner division having a new doorway to the hall and retaining the old name, the alteration giving "general satisfaction." For some years the front section has been unoccupied. Across the hallway the south room, variously styled the Men's Room, the Conversa-

tion Room and the Chess Room, has been, since June, 1899, a rendezvous for the Society of the Colonial Dames of America—right worthy guests of an institution itself colonial in origin and established by royal charter.

Though relieved of its former responsibility over the building and other matters in 1883, as above related, the Library Committee continues a potential force in the management. Its membership has varied in number at times, having been enlarged from six to seven in 1885, and even to eight in the single year 1893–1894; then in 1898 reduced from seven to six, at which figure it has since remained. Only four persons are elected by the board each May, the Treasurer and the Secretary being *ex officio* members always. Here again long periods of usefulness have been the rule. Besides Mr. Kennedy's thirty-year term already mentioned, Professor Drisler served for twenty years, Mr. Baldwin throughout his long trusteeship, and Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Mathews for about fifteen years each; while, of its members to-day (1908), Mr. Armstrong was first appointed in 1897.

Within the province of this committee falls the regulation of loans and of the hours when books and reading room may be accessible. In January, 1891, on its recommendation the board changed the time for the opening of the building from eight o'clock in the morning to nine; and four months later the reading room, which had been kept open until ten o'clock in the evening ever since November, 1840, was ordered closed at six o'clock with the loan department. This change was necessitated by the scant attendance of readers, owing to the distance of the Library from its members' homes. For a year or two the reading room was closed between the hours of twelve and two o'clock, but the measure arousing loud

disfavor was abandoned in 1894. For many years the building has regularly been closed, save for the return of books, during the last two weeks in August, thus allowing opportunity for repairs and inventory, at a time when the fewest demands are naturally made.

From the foundation of the Library until 1894,—140 years,—members were allowed only a single book at a time on each share, though for varying periods. From 1800 to 1896, three octavo or six duodecimo books might be borrowed, if belonging to a set. During the two years 1894 and 1895, shareholders and temporary subscribers were permitted to “take out *two* works”; but since the latter year they have been privileged “to take out *four* works at a time,” of which not more than one shall be new. At the same date there was abolished the antiquated custom of having the length of loan “proportioned as nearly as possible to the Bulk of the Volume,”—a rule in force, though differently phrased, ever since the adoption of the original Articles of 1754. Instead, new books may be kept one week only, and all other books for three weeks, with privileges of renewal, unless otherwise needed. Since 1838 a fine of one cent a day has been exacted on overdue books.

The chief business of the Library Committee—as indeed of the institution itself—is of course the proper increase and oversight of the books, including also pamphlets, current periodicals and daily papers. Ever since 1860 the annual report of the Trustees has contained a list of such additions, in part at least, together with statements from time to time of the number of accessions to the shelves during the previous year. In a word, therefore, it may be said here that the collection, which approximated 80,000 volumes in 1879, to-day com-



prises fully 100,000 books and pamphlets, scores of which are rare and unique among libraries, besides the valuable works in the Green Art Collection. This does not imply that the Society Library has kept every book once acquired; by no means. In December, 1883, on motion of Mr. Baldwin, the Library Committee was authorized "to examine the useless mass of ephemeral books now stored away in the alcoves of the upper story of the Library, and to dispose of such of them as may be worthless, either by sale or exchange, retaining, however, a copy in each case." By the continuance of this policy, the shelves are kept clear of much old lumber and at the same time additions are made to the income.

Besides judicious purchases, gifts of books and pamphlets from various sources have been received in abundance. These have been regularly acknowledged in the yearly reports, but a few merit attention here. In November, 1882, Mr. Kennedy further enriched the Green Alcove by some fifty volumes "of signal value and beauty." In December, 1883, Charles H. Contoit, destined to be the heaviest benefactor to the Library, presented a set of Audubon's "Birds of America" in four folio volumes, together with a handsome case. A distinctly unique gift came from Trustee Henry A. Cram in November, 1888, consisting of twelve folio volumes of superb photographs of the paintings of the old Italian masters, as also of the most celebrated architectural monuments in Italy. All of these prints were mounted under the direction of Mr. Cram himself, and their value enhanced by his explanatory and critical notes. In the spring of 1896, the Library received from the family of Mr. Cram, then deceased, eight additional volumes, similar to the others, the whole collection com-



Mrs. Mary Matilda (Drake) Keese  
Widow of the Rev. William L. Keese  
Benefactress, 1880





prising about 3000 examples, one of the largest in the country.

Through the liberality of Howland Pell, Esq., in memory of Arthur Pell, the Library, in March, 1895, became the owner of many rare editions of White's "Natural History of Selborne," with an ornamental case for their special preservation. This donation comprised sixteen different editions, including a *princeps* of 1789, of course of great value. The report for 1903 announces the receipt of "three unique little volumes" from Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, consisting of newspaper notices of marriages and deaths of leading New York families between the years 1838 and 1870, together with a full index of both married and maiden names,—all having been the painstaking work of the donor's mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Denning (Duer) King, wife of Archibald Gracie King, Esq.

At the same time acknowledgment was made of another handsome present by Mrs. J. Romeyn Brodhead, comprising 850 additional volumes from the library of her late husband. Among them were important historical works, rare Americana, sets of proceedings and works in the Dutch language, bearing on Holland and America. Still a third gift of distinct value came from the same kind source in 1905, to the extent of 300 choice unbound volumes and pamphlets on similar subjects.

In the list of donors published with each annual report, appear also the names of institutions and public bodies favoring the Library with statistical reports or other documents. In fact, the Society Library is well supplied with this class of matter, current as well as back numbers, so necessary for certain kinds of research. In this connection there was read to the board in November,

1905, from the Hon. Thomas C. Platt a letter "making inquiries as to the value of the daily issues of the *Congressional Record*"; whereupon Secretary Chew was requested "to thank the Honorable Senator and inform him the Library finds it valuable and desires it to be continued."

Gifts of other than printed matter have from time to time been received. In 1894 the Library became indebted to Mrs. Laura A. Delano for the large oil painting—"Cromwell Refusing the Crown," by Prof. Julius Schrader, 1870—that adorns the upper hall. A full-length plaster figure of Aristides was presented by Miss Anne V. R. Ogden in February, 1895; and in January, 1900, thanks were voted to the Rev. W. W. Moir for two exquisite marble busts,—“Spring” and “Autumn,” by Albano,—given in memory of his late father, James Moir, Esq.

Additional decorations of the main apartment comprise: an oil portrait of former Trustee Anthony Bleecker, the gift of his life-long friend, Gulian C. Verplanck; a handsome bronze bust of Frederic de Peyster, presented by his son, General J. Watts de Peyster; a marble bust of John G. Adams, M.D., long an active member of the institution; still another marble bust, a finely executed head of Napoleon, given by Miss Gertrude Collins; photographs under glass of Mrs. Mary M. Keese, a generous benefactress, and Walter Rutherford, a Trustee before the Revolution,—the latter picture copied from a portrait; a framed engraving of the late Trustee Frederic J. de Peyster, given in 1907 by Mrs. de Peyster; and an enlarged photograph of Charles H. Contoit, ordered by the board to be framed and “hung in the Library room.”

Besides well-preserved specimen impressions from the original bookplates, other relics of the remote past consist of several early certificates, issued prior to 1800, and bestowed by descendants, seal impressions and signatures still showing boldly. In very suggestive contrast to the valuable old engraving of New York in 1746, already described,<sup>1</sup> there hangs close by an appropriate companion-piece, a proof engraving of the city in 1855. A wholly unique souvenir is a framed uncashed cheque for four dollars on a Washington bank, dated May 2, 1904, and signed by Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States. It was given by Treasurer Foster, who personally paid for the cheque, it having been sent to pay the annual dues on the share owned by Mrs. Roosevelt, still registered as "Estate of Charles Carow."

In the two show-cases there are now on exhibition some of the earliest and more notable books from the Sharpe, Winthrop and Hammond collections, together with several rare copies of proceedings of various colonial legislatures. Here is also to be seen—a gift of Mrs. Sallie Morris Cory—an ornate copy of "The Booke of Common Prayer," printed in London in 1620. Its cover embellished with the Prince of Wales emblem of three ostrich plumes, it is said to have been used by a member of the House of Stuart. By the same donor were also given other quaint and interesting specimens of long-ago book-making.

It is now fitting to mention some of the very useful donations that have proved nothing short of indispensable, such as library furniture from the de Peysters and a fine typewriter, the gift of Mr. Schermerhorn. By far the most valuable of such conveniences is the full

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 395-397.



cataloguing of the Library's collections according to the Charles A. Cutter "dictionary" method. This great work, involving the services of trained cataloguers for about two years (1896-1898), together with a handsome set of cabinets and cards, has been made available to the institution through the exceptional generosity of a member of the board of Trustees, F. Augustus Schermerhorn, Esq. In terms of the street, this princely gift cost approximately \$15,000, thus writing its donor's name high on the roll of benefactors; but far above and beyond any intrinsic estimate should be regarded the permanent usefulness of such a donation. May the author of this great public service live long in the knowledge of an ever increasing appreciation of his broad and enduring philanthropy.

As has been stated in foregoing chapters, the Library published its last catalogue in 1850. A manuscript supplement of the "author" list was kept abreast of the times by Librarian Butler, but the board never felt prepared to meet the cost of publication. For some years prior to the introduction of the card system, the Leyden plan of "slips" had been in use, consisting simply of an author arrangement; and, just before the gift of Mr. Schermerhorn was offered, a "subject" classification was in process of preparation.

It now becomes pertinent to say it was by no mere chance that this particularly advanced embodiment of Mr. Schermerhorn's wise liberality should have synchronized with the advent of a new personality behind the Librarian's desk. In the report of 1896 it appears that Mr. Butler, "whose health had become much impaired, asked to be relieved from a portion of the active duties of his office. His long, faithful and useful service

to the Library entitled him to such relief, and accordingly Mr. Frank B. Bigelow, for three years Assistant Librarian at Columbia College, was appointed Acting Librarian—becoming Librarian on the first day of October last [1895]. Mr. Butler thereupon became Librarian Emeritus, and will continue to render his valuable services to the Library as far as his health may permit.”

Frank Barna Bigelow, a native of Amherst, Massachusetts, and a graduate of the well-known college there situated, laid the foundation of his successful career in an exacting apprenticeship under that renowned master of Library science, William I. Fletcher, A.M., Librarian of Amherst College. After a year of practical experience in the Columbia College Library on Forty-ninth street, Mr. Bigelow was appointed its Reference Librarian, from which position he was called, as above related, to the Society Library. Here his varied talents have found a freer scope and have won for him recognition in his chosen field.

And now a word of him who has so long been in the Society Library as to seem wholly of it—Wentworth S. Butler, Librarian Emeritus. Seldom has that distinction been more fittingly conferred. Few positions demand more patience, self-control and tact than the stewardship so long held by this approved good and faithful servant. On all sides are to be seen tangible evidences of his efficiency. But who can adequately tell of the countless extra steps he has taken in the Library's behalf, of his untiring efforts to keep up the membership roll, of the real pain that every lapsed share has given him, and of his devout rejoicing over each new registration! Of his unostentatious services in securing a remis-

sion of the taxes levied on the Library, as also of the inaudible hints and suggestions that have played their part in securing some of the notable bequests to the institution, no one can ever know. Mr. Butler, though he loves to recall men and events of by-gone days, lives not in the past. Over eighty years of age, and in the fifty-third year of his devotion to the Library, he is yet found there almost daily, scanning his favorite periodicals and assisting unobtrusively but materially in the current routine.

During the long period of Mr. Butler's incumbency, and in the dozen years since Librarian Bigelow has been at the helm, assistants have come and gone in profusion. A few may be mentioned here for meritorious service. Upon the resignation of Robert W. Cana in 1873, after a term of seven years as Assistant Librarian, that post was held until his death in December, 1890, by John Forbes, a son and grandson of former Librarians. He was succeeded in turn by Samuel J. Black, who retired in 1896. From November, 1902, for about four years Miss Annie L. Elliott presided at the loan desk to general satisfaction. The Green Alcove was attended for some years by Miss Alice Sandford, who resigned in October, 1882. She was followed by Miss Jennie L. Butler, whose acceptability continued through a term of nineteen years, her withdrawal, in February, 1901, calling forth a special vote of thanks from the board "for her fidelity and useful services." Her immediate successor was Miss Constance Ogden, until February, 1906. The present staff of the Library (1908) comprises, besides Messrs. Bigelow and Butler, Mrs. M. L. Chamberlain and Miss Marion D. Morrison, at the loan desk, and Messrs. Jacob Ermoloff, cataloguer, and George F.



Baker, in charge of the shelf department, the two last-named having been connected with the institution since 1896 and 1897, respectively.

In the matter of the circulation of the books, it appears that the extraordinary record of 32,642 volumes reached in the year 1864-1865 was finally surpassed in the year 1898-1899, since which time it has risen to nearly 40,000. But this does not mean that the building is thronged all day with impatient book-borrowers. Quite the reverse; indeed, no quieter as well as more spacious or brighter accommodations could be desired for undisturbed reading or study. Even so, the attendance of visitors during the past six years has averaged over 20,000. It is really fortunate for the staff and for those who do come that all the members are not frequenters.

Aside from the rather out-of-the-way situation of the Library, another factor in the reduction of attendance is the free delivery system. Like many another custom this has had a gradual growth. Beginning with the year 1882, books were occasionally sent to the homes of subscribers "at a small charge"; although, to be fair to the management of that day, it was said in the report for 1883 that "such deliveries should be made free whenever the income of the Library will justify the employment of messengers for that purpose."

By 1892 the plan was regularly adopted, at the nominal cost of the carriers' carfares, the first year showing a total of between 600 and 700 books thus circulated. Within the next twelve months this number was more than doubled; while, by the last report (1908), it appears that "our messengers carried 37,537 books, visiting 11,288 residences and offices between No. 1 Broadway and 147th Street," a gain of more than 6000 books over

the year before. It only remains to state that in February, 1904, the free delivery of books was introduced by the Trustees, to show their disposition toward the shareholders. Such an attitude is possible because of the wholly responsible character of the membership, for the Society Library can safely circulate books whose cost would not only preclude purchase but render circulation hazardous in many libraries, whether subscription or free. Because of this liberal policy, it is said, the late President Henry Morton of Stevens Institute left to the Society Library a valuable bequest of some eighty volumes on Egyptology, in January, 1905.

At the same time the management has uniformly paid proper heed to its chief charge. Though the regulations as to the number and extent of loans have long been most liberal, and though members have unrestricted access to the shelves, insistence is maintained upon fines for overdue books and upon recompense for lost or damaged copies. A single instance may be cited to show devotion to trust, even in the face of a little "feeling." In March, 1889, in response to a request from the Washington Inaugural Centennial committee for the loan of certain journals of that early period, for display in the Metropolitan Opera House, fully insured, the board did "not feel authorized to incur the risk of the loss or mutilation of the newspapers asked for." Here was a chance for free advertising, but the temptation was resisted.

The Society Library has never yielded to the popular craze for charlatan self-exploitation. Once a year in dignified statements its advantages and claims are set before the public in the annual report of the Trustees.<sup>1</sup> He who runs may read, and pause and read again; or he

<sup>1</sup> Since 1896 bulletins of new books have been issued at frequent intervals.

may speed on, unobservant. The institution surely will not run after him. Figures prove that the running to the Library is on the constant increase. During the past year (1907-1908) the number of yearly subscribers—not shareholders—was over two hundred, larger than ever before.

In 1881, besides the yearly report, the Trustees published a pamphlet<sup>1</sup> of some fifty pages, containing: (1) an historical notice of the Library; (2) the Articles of Subscription, 1754; (3) the Charter; (4) its legislative confirmation, 1789; (5) its successive amendments; (6) the by-laws; (7) a list of Trustees since 1754; (8) a list of Librarians since 1793; (9) a list of shareholders, 1881. Of these divisions the historical sketch and the two former lists follow the lines, as the errors, of earlier publications, already reviewed; while the documentary matter is also familiar. The carefully revised by-laws are important as being the first (and the last) printed since 1855.

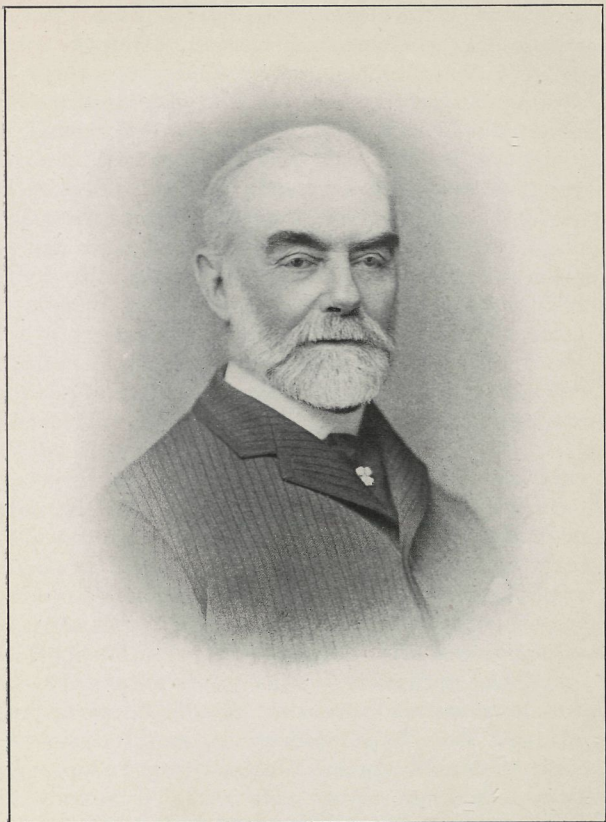
The "list of persons holding rights" is interesting and well worth regarding briefly at least. In the twenty years since the last published record, many names notable in divers branches of human endeavor and achievement had become identified with membership in the Society Library. To mention but a few on the roll is necessary, though difficult. There might be named Samuel F. Appleton, the honored head of the great publishing house; Charles Carow, a highly respected merchant, the father of Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt; Alexander I. Cotheal, a scholar of great linguistic attainments; Judge Charles P. Daly; Edward F. de Lancey, noted for

<sup>1</sup> *New York Society Library. Lists of Trustees and Shareholders. History, Charter, By-laws, &c., with* New York, 1881.



historical research and editing; General J. Watts de Peyster, writer on military and historical affairs, and a man of considerable philanthropy; the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, whose extended rectorship of Trinity Church has but lately been closed by death; William A. Duncan, for years chief clerk in the vestry office of that same ancient parish; William M. Evarts, David Dudley Field and Hamilton Fish, all national figures as jurists and statesmen; Elbridge T. Gerry and Nathaniel L. Griswold, leaders in commerce as also in the social world; Charles H. Haswell, the distinguished civil and marine engineer, who only lately passed away (May, 1907), at the advanced age of nearly ninety-nine years, in the full possession of his faculties; the Rev. Dr. Roswell Dwight Hitchcock, professor in Union Seminary and voluminous writer on theological and sacred subjects; the Very Rev. Eugene Augustus Hoffman, D.D., late dean of the General Seminary; the Hon. John Jay, a lawyer and diplomat not unworthy of an illustrious lineage; William T. Jerome, the renowned district attorney, then a lad in his teens; Wheeler H. Peckham, Esq., a lawyer of commanding ability and ever a stalwart for reform and disinterestedness in positions of fiduciary trust; S. Whitney Phoenix, booklover and man of letters; the University Place Presbyterian Church; the estate of Theodore Roosevelt, then but lately deceased, a name held in affectionate remembrance as the promoter of every good work; and, in conclusion, the gracious personality of Miss Catherine L. Wolfe, a woman of wide and intelligent charity and a generous giver to public institutions, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The influence of an institution such as the Society



Charles Henry Contoit

Benefactor, 1897





Library is scarcely tangible enough to hazard an estimate. It will not be amiss, however, to name over some of those who have borne afar, along varied paths of culture, the torch of letters from this unfailing source of light. The names of Halleck, Kent, Irving, Poe, Bryant, Verplanck and Duyckinck will serve to revive by-gone luster of days when the Library was the center and rendezvous of famous literary coteries. Unlikely as is a return to these former conditions, especially in this present age of club-life, the Library is no less ready to meet the situation. The report for 1908 says: "The list of the leading Clubs of the City to which reading matter is now furnished includes the Army and Navy, the Century, the Columbia University, the Knickerbocker, the Metropolitan, the Yale, the Union, the Union League and the University."

Among recent and contemporary authors, who have been only too happy to express indebtedness to the Society Library, may be mentioned Russell Sturgis, John Bigelow, Edward Eggleston, General James Grant Wilson, Professor William Milligan Sloane, Mrs. Burton Harrison, Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, Mrs. George C. Riggs (Kate Douglas Wiggin), Miss Esther Singleton, Gherardi Davis, Paul Leicester Ford and President Roosevelt. Besides the memory of its own honored, the Library treasures recollections of visits from the renowned of other lands. Years ago Thackeray made glad use of its stores when on his American lecture-tour, and this very year the institution has been visited by Mrs. Humphry Ward.

As always in the past, the membership list bears the highest stamp of distinction in citizenship and in social standing. With many families it is a matter of pride to

keep up connection with the Society Library; on its registry books to-day are found between forty and fifty names of the early supporters and charter members, to say nothing of innumerable descendants bearing other names. At the present time (1908) the number of shares held in the Library is about 725, the great majority of which are unassessed or free. It is to be deplored that the once great number of shares has been so reduced, or even that it has not held its own; but the free library naturally attracts the people of moderate means, while the wealthy often prefer to buy their books, whether or not they may be private collectors.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the income from assessable shares was \$2008 during the year 1903-1904. Since then there have been numerous commutings of the yearly dues. Meanwhile the sum received for temporary subscriptions has been steadily advancing from \$245 for the year 1878-1879, until by the last fiscal report (1907-1908) it was given as \$2262, an amount in excess of the annual payments of proprietors (\$1526)!

Coming now to the subject of the actual finances of the institution for the last time, it may be said truly that the lines have fallen unto the Library in pleasant places these latter days. Despite a lessened membership roll, there has been an entire absence of the pecuniary burdens that made some of the earlier periods so dark and anxious. For more than fifty years the institution not only has been out of debt, but, through further timely bequests and uniformly careful management, has had a permanent fund of constantly increasing proportions.

At the close of the fiscal year, March 31, 1879, the value of the property—exclusive of the books, then in-

<sup>1</sup> In 1907, however, a free share (\$150) brought \$152 at a sale.

sured for \$46,000—was estimated at \$130,000, while \$58,000 besides was invested in bonds and mortgages. In the spring of 1880 a handsome bequest of \$12,000 was received from the estate of Mrs. Mary M. Keese. A few months later came \$1000, bequeathed as a token of regard by the late Treasurer Mount.<sup>1</sup> Many years later one of his sisters, Miss Maria B. Mount, similarly remembered the institution in her will, the sum of \$1000 being received in April, 1901.

By far the largest donation in the history of the Society Library is due to the munificence of Charles H. Contoit, for years a most interested shareholder. Mr. Contoit, who died in December, 1897, in his seventy-sixth year, was the ranking vestryman of Trinity parish and a man of large but unobtrusive generosity. Devoted to church interests, he delighted in ministering to the poor and needy with fuel, food and clothing, and he especially loved to help young men and boys. The Library was named as one of his residuary legatees, but owing to various delays the last instalment was not paid until 1903, the sum-total then amounting to \$142,586.68. Thus the gifts of money to the Library, including the \$5000 bequeathed by Miss Elizabeth Demilt in 1849, aggregate the very gratifying amount of \$215,086.68. By the last report (1908) the whole property of the Society Library—excluding the books, now insured for \$132,795<sup>2</sup>—is valued at \$420,146.49, all safely invested.

In contemplating these statistics of modest prosperity, one instinctively formulates the vain trite wish that the men who founded the Library, as also those who tided

<sup>1</sup> This modest amount is yet distinctive in being the *only bequest* from a *Trustee* in the history of the Library.

<sup>2</sup> The insurance on the building has been only slightly advanced from \$44,000 in 1879 to \$50,000 at the present time.



the institution through the stormiest weather, might be privileged to behold what time hath wrought on their labors. Yet after all they believed in its future, and they were content in their great faith with the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. All honor to their unwearied devotion, not alone to the Library's welfare but toward elevating the literary standards of their day and community. This institution may well be proud of the character and attainments of its long procession of Trustees; and in turn a seat at its council board has conferred a coveted and worthy distinction upon successive incumbents. Through them, as representatives of its membership roll, the Society Library has long since become deeply and vitally interwoven with the very fiber of New York.

It now remains only to touch upon the recent observance of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Society Library, before bringing this long narrative to a close. In February, 1904, "the question of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Library" was committed to the consideration of the late Chairman Curtis, former Treasurer Foster and Secretary Chew. Inasmuch as the preparation of the present volume had just been authorized by Messrs. Baldwin, Chew and Swords,—as stated in the preface,—it was decided not to hold any commemorative exercises, but simply to plan a week's display of the rarities in the possession of the Library. Accordingly invitations were issued to such persons as would be interested, as well as to city officials and officers of other local institutions of a literary or artistic character. So generally did people avail themselves of the opportunity, and so much enthusiasm was expressed by visitors and the press, that the exhibition was ex-

tended to include a fortnight, between April 26th and May 7th.

To enumerate all the treasures in the possession of the Library would not be vain repetitions but impossible for lack of space. In general, and to include a few titles of particularly rare works, it may be said that its collection is especially rich in Americana,—books, pamphlets, newspapers and autograph letters of distinguished persons, including the Presidents of the United States,—and in the genealogical field. It has an almost perfect set of city directories; a notable assortment of early New York newspapers, prior to 1800, including Bradford's *Gazette* from 1726 to 1729, a unique possession; full sets of the *Evening Post* and *Commercial Advertiser* from 1800 to 1900, and nearly complete files of all the local dailies before 1900. Here is also to be found an imposing array of first editions of English as well as American writers, as also of French memoirs and histories.

Among uncommon works should be named an unusually full set of New York Colonial and Session Laws, a beautifully colored copy of Visscher's "Novi Belgii . . . Tabula" (about 1650), Vander Donck's "Nieuw-Nederlant" (1656), Andrew Bradford's Laws of Pennsylvania (1738), the Charters of Pennsylvania, printed by Franklin in 1742, Acts of the Assembly of Virginia, printed by W. Hunter in 1752, Acts of the Assembly of New Jersey, printed by James Parker in 1761, etc., etc., as well as such monumental works as Napoleon's "Egypt," Lepsius's "Egypt," Audubon's "Birds" (first folio edition), Kingsborough's "Mexican Antiquities," Montfaucon's "L'antiquité expliquée" and "Les monumens de la monarchie Française," etc., etc.

(29)

A Catalogue of Books belonging  
to John Sharpe intended to be given as  
a foundation of a Publick Library at  
New York.

## I The holy Scriptures

The English Bible 4<sup>th</sup>

Biblia Sacra Septuagint. Cambridge.

Biblia Sacra Vulgat.

Novum Testamentum Vulgat. parisijs. 1649

Psalterium Hebr. Lat. cum calendarij Hebr. & Græc. Lat.  
cum Gouddard argumentis. parisijs. 1605.

Novum Testamentum Hispanicum.

A Dutch Bible.

Cambridge Concordance.

## II. Criticks and Commentators

Loigh Critica Sacra: anth.

Do Lightfooti opera 2. vol. folio. anth.

Willots Hexapla in Exodum

Leviticum

Danielom

Romanos

Innis in Epistolam Iude.



The John C. Green Alcoves of books on the fine arts are particularly replete with works in the subjects of decoration and in the several schools of painting, as also with large illustrated texts on individual painters, miniatures, costumes, lace, furniture and heraldry, together with full sets of the best art periodicals and illustrated folio volumes of all the European galleries. The Library also contains one of the best architectural collections in the city.

While the wide range of the exhibition was well calculated to attract persons of diverse tastes, none could fail to be interested in the old Clarendon history, labeled "Belonging to y<sup>e</sup> Library of New York in America 1711,"<sup>1</sup> and still more touched at sight of the hundred-odd pathetic-looking tomes of the John Sharpe Collection, given in 1713 "as a foundation of a Publick Library at New York."<sup>2</sup> Fittingly indeed are these ancient volumes cherished to-day by the Society Library,—itself by far the oldest Library in this state,—as memorials of the alas too advanced public spirit of poor Chaplain Sharpe. A still closer tie confirms its present repository as the proper home of the older collection, from the fact that it once formed part of the Corporation Library, opened in 1730 as the first Public Circulating Library in New York, and from 1754 to 1776 under the control of the Trustees of the Society Library.<sup>3</sup> Upon this interesting sequence of events has been based the statement, occasionally made, that the Society Library is the oldest Public Library in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 20, 119.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 43-64, 118.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 77-78, 119, 156.

## CONCLUSION

1904-1908

**A**S all matters of routine or of a business character, pertaining to this brief span, have been comprehended within the last chapter, it is fitting to terminate the long narrative in a more personal vein. In these few years several serious inroads have occurred in the ranks of the Trustees. In October, 1906, came the regretted resignation of Edward King, sometime Chairman, in the twenty-second year of his term. A former president of the Stock Exchange and a notable figure in financial circles, he proved himself, in his services as chairman of the "King Committee" in the recent panic, a worthy scion of his patriotic father, James Gore King, the banker, and of his illustrious grandfather, the Hon. Rufus King, one-time Trustee of the Library.

The other changes have been due to the inexorable leveler. Charles B. Curtis, who died in March, 1905, had served for over twelve years, long holding the secretaryship, and was Chairman at his death. He ranks as an author of note, his book, "Velasquez and Murillo," winning him an international reputation; while he often contributed to standard periodicals, chiefly on genealogical and art subjects. Two months later died Frederic J. de Peyster, nephew of Frederic de Peyster, a lawyer by

profession, whose wide interests made him active in numberless literary, social and charitable movements. His thirty years of service caused his associates to regard him "as one of the pillars of our edifice, and the absence of his name from our roll makes our meetings seem like those of another and strange body." On the other hand, after but a brief trusteeship, S. Franklin Stanton died in June, 1907, a retired member of the Stock Exchange, a man "conservative in taste and habit, in marked contrast to the general trend of sentiment during the later years of his life."

In November, 1907, there passed away that accomplished and knightly soul, whose name had so long adorned the head of the trustee roll—Frederick Sheldon, Gentleman, in his thirty-seventh year of service. In these discriminating words of tender and affectionate regard for "the Nestor of our body," Mr. Baldwin gave apt expression to the general sentiment of loss and appreciation:

Mr. Sheldon was possessed of unusually fine literary tastes, and his power of criticism, though delicate, was searching. His style of writing was of the purest, and his sense of humor enabled him to delineate characters with a pen, which, while he was too kind to wound, developed traits in the subject of his criticism, which a less trained and capable mind would have failed to discover. . . . A courteous gentleman and an accomplished scholar has passed from our midst, and the record of his association with us is a story of most valuable influence and is most fragrant in the recollection.

Scarcely three months were vouchsafed to Mr. Baldwin as ranking Trustee, his wide-felt death occurring in February, 1908, after nearly twenty-five years of devoted ministration to the Library. He had served as Secretary



for eleven years, as Chairman for four, and as a member of the Library Committee during all his term, its chairman for the last decade. Though he was identified with innumerable literary and social organizations, the Society Library ever held first place in his affections. The annual report for 1908 says: "His long service to our institution in many capacities, his legal and literary knowledge and practical common sense made him an invaluable member of the Board, and the loss is felt more deeply as the days go by." At a special meeting of the Trustees immediately after his obsequies, which despite a furious storm were attended by a noteworthy assemblage at the Marble Collegiate Church, there was adopted this minute, prepared by Chairman Foster in phrases notable not alone for choice diction but for their ring of genuine feeling, a tribute the most beautiful recorded throughout the history of the Library:

In the ripeness of his age, at the summit of his useful career, George Van Nest Baldwin, our associate and friend, has passed from among the living, to receive, as we reverently believe, the eternal reward of a life well spent and worthy.

A lawyer, learned, accomplished, sagacious, a man of rare social qualities, endearing him to a multitude of friends, he was also by choice and natural predisposition a man of letters, knowing clearly and loving always the wondrous charm of literature. And so it came about that to this institution, the object of his literary devotion, he gave without stint or reserve his intelligent and affectionate interest. In duration of service the oldest member of our Board, and for years its Chairman, every day of his long trusteeship has added to the Library's debt of gratitude to him for work well done and faithfully. The last effort of his life, put forth when the shadows were already gathering, was for us and for our well-being.

And therefore remembering the man who is gone, and his



George Van Nest Baldwin

Trustee, 1883-1908. Secretary, 1883-1894. Chairman, 1894-1898





unremitting and ever successful zeal in our behalf, remembering his intellectual power and culture, mindful even more of his manly and yet gentle personality, his pure and spotless life, and while the sound of the funeral bell has hardly died away into silence, do we, the Trustees of the New York Society Library, make this brief record of our loss, sorrowing for that in this world which he did so much to make brighter and better, we shall see his face again no more.

Although the board agreed that Mr. Baldwin's death was a great personal loss and a severe blow to the Library, and that his duties would be taken up by others with heavy hearts; nevertheless it is a strong though melancholy testimonial to the stability of the institution that its work can go on without interruption under such bereavement. It is therefore proper and indeed requisite to regard briefly the status and the mission of the Society Library to-day.

Absolutely without incumbrance but with a handsome though not excessive endowment, deriving an excellent income furthermore from the annual payments of shareholders and its fast-growing array of temporary subscribers, with a splendid collection of over 100,000 volumes housed in its own dignified and attractive building, this ancient though vigorous institution faces the future with justifiable confidence. Although the rapid expansion of the city has wholly altered the original character of its environment and left the Library remote from residential centers; yet, thanks to the wisdom of its Trustees, it is within ready reach by telephone and by the admirable messenger system, while the strong sentiment for a new and more advantageous location awaits only the right opportunity and adequate funds.

Frequenters of the Society Library encounter none of

the discomforts of over-crowded public libraries, and may browse at will among the alcoves or read in quiet corners, unhampered by burdensome restrictions. It is in such a peaceful atmosphere that the true love of reading and a genuine taste for letters are formed and cultivated. Here are to be found not alone standard works of reference and the great staples of general literature, together with innumerable rarities to gladden the hearts of antiquarians, art lovers or special investigators, but also the latest productions, whether light or serious, on the date of their publication. The best books are supplied with little hesitation as to cost, and suggestions from members and subscribers for desirable additions are welcomed by the management. The fact that the books of the Society Library circulate through a select membership is no reproach. Among such a constituency are included earnest thinkers and writers, and men of large affairs no less, conservative leaders of the thought and the movements of their day.

Thus the Society Library, despite the increasing expansion of the free public library system, shows ever a very noticeable advance year by year. Founded broad-based on individual initiative and desire for public improvement, it has been perpetuated through coöperative effort and touching devotion, as a conspicuous asset in the culture-life of the community. Among members and officers throughout its long history appear countless names representative of achievement and honor in American citizenship. Holding positions of eminence in all lines of human endeavor, they have spread far and wide the quiet but pervasive influence of the New York Society Library, now auspiciously journeying toward its two-hundredth milestone.

## APPENDIX





# I

## ARTICLES OF THE SUBSCRIPTION ROLL OF THE NEW YORK LIBRARY

(As written in the book of Trustees' minutes, April 2, 1754.)

WHEREAS a Publick Library would be very useful, as well as ornamental to this City & may be also advantageous to our intended College; We whose Names are hereunto subscribed, in order to promote the Design of erecting one in this City, do promise to pay *Five Pounds* New York Currency, each on the first Day of May next ensuing the Date hereof; and *Ten Shillings* yearly, each, on every first Day of May forever hereafter, to TWELVE TRUSTEES, to be chosen by the Majority of us, or our Assigns, annually, out of the number of Subscribers hereto, or their Assigns; for which Purpose, we agree to meet constantly on the last Tuesday in April, in every Year ensuing the Date hereof, at the Exchange in Broad Street, in this City, between the Hours of Eleven & Twelve; which Trustees, or the Majority of them, are hereby impowered to dispose of the said Money, in purchasing such Books, as they shall think proper from Time to Time, and in procuring a House or Room to deposit them in; To appoint a Library Keeper, and allow him a proper Sallary for his care & attendance of the said Library; to regulate the Terms on which the Books belonging to the said Library shall be lent (those who are not Subscribers being to pay such Rates for the Loan of Books as the Trustees shall appoint) and to do every Thing they shall judge necessary to erect, preserve, ornament & improve the said Library; which they are to keep under the following Regulations

Ist Every Subscriber, or his Assigns, shall have a Right to

take out one Book at a Time, depositing in Cash, at least one third more than the value of it, with the Library Keeper, and to keep it for so long a Time as the Trustees for the Time being shall appoint, to be proportioned as nearly as possible to the Bulk of the Volumn; and in case he shall keep it longer to pay for the use of the said Book, after the Expiration of the said Time according to the Rates (to be settled by the Trustees) to be paid by those who shall not be Subscribers hereto. For this Purpose Books shall be valued by the Trustees, and a Catalogue of them with the<sup>1</sup> Price of each Book be made & left in the Hands of the Library Keeper.

2<sup>ndly</sup> Every Subscriber may alienate or bequeath his Right, as of any other Chattel.

3<sup>rdly</sup> No Person shall have above one Vote, tho' he shou'd subscribe more than is above mentioned or purchase several Rights.

4<sup>thly</sup> Part of a Subscription Right shall not be regarded or entitle the Owner to any Priviledges whatsoever.

5<sup>thly</sup> Every Subscriber who refuses to pay the *ten shillings* yearly shall forfeit his Right & Priviledges in the said Library but if either he or any other in his name pay the Arrears with Lawful Interest from the several Times of their becoming due, he or they shall be as fully restored to them upon such Payment, as if such Forfeiture had not incurred.

6<sup>thly</sup> The Trustees shall serve Gratis.

7<sup>thly</sup> They may appoint a Treasurer if they shall think proper, & make him a proper Allowance for his Trouble not exceeding 5  $\text{p}$  Cent on all the money he shall receive into his Hands from Time to Time for the use of the said Library.<sup>2</sup>

8<sup>thly</sup> No Trustee shall be appointed Treasurer.

9<sup>thly</sup> The Election of Trustees shall Be by Balloting each putting the whole Number he Votes for upon one Ballot.

10<sup>thly</sup> The trustees Shall if they think Proper admitt any person to be come a Subscriber after y<sup>e</sup> date hereof upon payment of the Like Sum of *Five pounds* which is the Originall

<sup>1</sup> The rest of this article and the six following articles are entered in another hand.

<sup>2</sup> Succeeding articles are written in still a third hand.



Subscription money and *Ten Shillings* Ⓕ Annum from y<sup>e</sup> first Day of may [*sic*] next till the time of his subscription.

11<sup>thly</sup> That the rights & Priviledges in the said Library in consequence of such subscription and the Loan of Books to such as shall not Subscribe hereto shall not be Confined to this City but that Every Person residing in this province may become a Subscriber or have the Loan of Books in the manner and on the terms herein mentioned or hereafter to be Prescribed.

12<sup>thly</sup> That regular accounts of the Several Sums received as subscription or for the Loan of Books and of the Disbursement arising from y<sup>e</sup> Purchasing Books [and] for erecting enlarging and repairing the said Library shall be exhibited to the Subscribers hereto or to their Assigns at Every annual Meeting on the last thuesday [*sic*] in Aprill upon pain of the Forfeiture of the right and Priviledges of Every Trustee that shall be Delinquent in this Particular.

13<sup>thly</sup> That the Trustees for the time being shall make such Further Rules and orders for the Better Support of y<sup>e</sup> Said Library as to them or the majority of them shall seem meet which rules and orders so to be made by them shall be Subject to the Confirmation or repeal of the Subscribers hereto or their assigns at Each annual meeting aforesaid.

14<sup>thly</sup> That the majority of y<sup>e</sup> Subscribers hereto or their assigns at every Annual Meeting forever hereafter shall if they think proper alter correct or repeal all or any of the above rules and orders or any Other Rules and orders hereafter to be made and make such further and other Rules and orders as to them shall seem meet and most Condusive to the support and increase of the said Library.

## II

### THE CHARTER OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, SIGNED NOVEMBER 9, 1772

*GEORGE the Third, by the Grace of GOD, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and so forth. To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:*

WHEREAS our loving subjects, John Watts, William Smith, Robert R. Livingston, Whitehead Hicks, William Livingston, Goldsbrow Banyar and Samuel Jones, of our city of New York, Esquires; Peter Van Brugh Livingston and Peter Keteltas, of our said city of New York, merchants; Walter Rutherford and David Clarkson, of our said city of New York, gentlemen; and Samuel Bard, of our said city of New York, physician,—by their humble petition presented unto our trusty and well-beloved William Tryon, Esq., our captain-general and governor-in-chief in and over our province of New York and the territories depending thereon in America, chancellor and vice-admiral of the same, and read in our council for our said province on the eighth day of September last past,—did set forth: That sundry persons conceiving a public library would be useful as well as ornamental to our said city of New York, did, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty-four, set on foot a subscription, in order to promote the design of erecting one in our said city, and did thereby promise to pay *five pounds*, New York currency, each, on the first day of May, in the said year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty-four, and *ten shillings* yearly, each, on every first day of May for ever thereafter, to twelve trustees, to be chosen by the

majority of the subscribers, or their assigns, annually, out of the number of subscribers thereto, or their assigns (for which purpose the said subscribers did thereby agree to meet constantly, on the last Tuesday in April in every year, at the Exchange in Broad Street, in our said city of New York, between the hours of eleven and twelve); which trustees, or the majority of them, were thereby empowered to dispose of the said money in purchasing such books as they should think proper, from time to time, and in procuring a house or room to deposit them in; to appoint a librarian, and allow him a proper salary for his care and attendance of the said library; to regulate the terms on which the books belonging to the said library should be lent, and to do everything they should judge necessary to erect, preserve, ornament and improve the said library; That the moneys subscribed as aforesaid, amounting to *six hundred pounds*, current money of New York, together with so much of the annual payments as could be collected, had been applied according to the terms of the said subscription; by which means the said library was become very considerable, but would increase much faster, and might be made of greater public utility, if a corporation should be formed for that purpose; And, therefore, the petitioners, being the present trustees of the said library, humbly prayed our letters patent, forming a corporation for the purposes aforesaid. Now we, taking into our royal consideration the beneficial tendency of such an institution within our said city, are graciously pleased to grant the said humble request of our said loving subjects. *Know ye, therefore,* That we of our especial grace, certain knowledge and mere motion, have willed, given, granted, ordained, constituted and appointed, and by these presents do will, give, grant, ordain, constitute and appoint, That the said John Watts, William Smith, Robert R. Livingston, Whitehead Hicks, William Livingston, Goldsbrow Banyar, Samuel Jones, Peter Van Brugh Livingston, Peter Keteltas, Walter Rutherford, David Clarkson and Samuel Bard; John Cruger, James Duane, Richard Morris, Philip Livingston, Lambert Moore, James Jauncey, Robert R. Livingston, Jun., Henry Holland, Leonard Lispenard, John Morin Scott, Elias Desbrosses,



Augustus Van Cortlandt, Richard Nicholls and Peter Van Schaack, all of our said city of New York, Esquires; George Duncan Ludlow of Queen's County, Esq.; Robert Livingston, of the manor of Livingston, in the county of Albany, Esq.; the Reverend Samuel Auchmuty, of our said city of New York, doctor of divinity; John Troup, of Jamaica, in Queen's County, Esq.; Abraham Brinckerhoff, William Robinson, Isaac Low, John Hunt, Theophilact Bache, Gerard W. Beekman, Matthias Gomez, William Ludlow, Humphrey Jones, Gerard G. Beekman, David Van Horne, Lawrence Reade, John Livingston, Laurence Kortright, John Alsop, William Kelly, William Walton, Peter T. Curtenius, Henry Remsen, Jun., and Garrit Abeel, all of our said city of New York, merchants; Gulian Ver Planck, Thomas Barclay, Jun., and Abraham De Peyster, all of our said city of New York, gentlemen; John Wiley and Joseph Greswold, of our said city of New York, distillers; Hugh Gaine, of our said city of New York, printer; William Brownjohn, of our said city of New York, apothecary; Peter Renaudet, surgeon; and Anne Waddel, of our said city of New York, widow; Being such of the subscribers to the said library, or their assigns, as have not only paid the said sum of *five pounds*, but also the said *ten shillings* yearly, ever since; and such other persons as shall be hereafter admitted members of the corporation hereby erected, be, and for ever hereafter shall be, by virtue of these presents, one body corporate and politic, in deed, fact and name, by the name, style and title of *The Trustees of the New York Society Library*. And them and their successors by the same name, we do, by these presents, really and fully make, erect, create, constitute and declare one body politic and corporate, in deed, fact and name, for ever; and will give, grant and ordain, that they and their successors, the trustees of *The New York Society Library*, by the same name, shall and may have perpetual succession; and shall and may, by the same name, be persons capable in the law to sue and be sued, implead and be impleaded, answer and be answered unto, defend and be defended in all courts and elsewhere, in all manner of actions, suits, complaints, pleas, causes, matters and demands whatsoever, as fully and amply as any other of our

liege subjects of our said province of New York may or can sue or be sued, implead or be impleaded, defend or be defended, by any lawful ways or means whatsoever: and that they and their successors, by the same name, shall forever hereafter, be persons capable and able in the law to purchase, take, hold, receive and enjoy to them and their successors, any messuages, tenements, houses and real estate whatsoever; and all other hereditaments, of whatsoever nature, kind or quality they be, in fee simple, for term of life or lives, or in any other manner howsoever; and also any goods, chattels, and personal estate whatsoever; provided always, the clear yearly value of the said real estate doth not at any time exceed the sum of *one thousand pounds sterling*, lawful money of our kingdom of Great Britain, above all outgoings and reprises: And that they and their successors, by the same name, shall have full power and authority to give, grant, sell, lease, demise and dispose of the same real estate and hereditaments whatsoever, for life or lives, or years, or forever; and also all goods, chattels and personal estate whatsoever, at their will and pleasure, as they shall judge to be most beneficial and advantageous for the said library. And that it shall and may be lawful for them and their successors, forever hereafter, to have a common seal to serve for the causes and business of them and their successors; and the same seal to change, alter, break and make new from time to time, at their will and pleasure. And our royal will and pleasure is, that when our said corporation hereby erected, shall have acquired, by subscriptions of the members, by donation or otherwise, a proper and convenient piece of ground in our said city of New York, and funds sufficient for that purpose, that they do erect within our said city of New York a *public library*; which we will, shall forever hereafter be called by the name of *The New York Society Library*. And that it shall and may be lawful for our said corporation, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, to erect for their use and convenience any other house, houses or buildings whatsoever: And for the better carrying into execution the purposes aforesaid, our royal will and pleasure is, and we do hereby for us, our heirs and successors, give and grant unto the Trustees of *The New York*

*Society Library*, and their successors forever, that there shall be forever hereafter belonging to our said corporation, twelve trustees of the said library and corporation, who shall conduct and manage the affairs and business of the said library and corporation, in the manner hereinafter directed and appointed. And we do hereby assign, constitute and appoint the aforesaid John Watts, William Smith, Robert R. Livingston, Whitehead Hicks, William Livingston, Goldsbrow Banyar, Samuel Jones, Peter Van Brugh Livingston, Peter Keteltas, Walter Rutherford, David Clarkson and Samuel Bard, to be the present trustees of the said library and corporation, and who shall hold, possess and enjoy their said offices until the last Tuesday in April now next ensuing; and for keeping up the succession in the said offices, our royal will and pleasure is, and we do hereby for us, our heirs and successors, establish, direct and require of, and give and grant to the Trustees of *The New York Society Library*, and their successors forever, that on the said last Tuesday in April next ensuing, and yearly and every year forever thereafter, on the last Tuesday in April in every year, the members for the time being, of our said corporation, shall meet at the Exchange, in Broad Street, in our said city of New York, or at some other convenient place in our said city of New York, to be fixed and ascertained by some of the by-laws or regulations of our said corporation, and there, by the majority of such of them as shall so meet, shall, by ballot, elect and choose twelve of their members to be trustees of the said library and corporation for the year ensuing, who shall immediately enter upon their said offices, and hold, exercise and enjoy the same, from the time of such elections, for and during the space of one year, and until other fit persons shall be elected and chosen in their places; and in case any of the said persons by these presents nominated and appointed to be trustees of the said library and corporation, or who shall hereafter be elected and chosen thereto, shall die or remove out of our said city of New York, before the time of their appointed service shall be expired, or refuse or neglect to act in and execute the said office, then and in every such case, our royal will and pleasure is, and we do hereby give and grant,



and direct and require, that the surviving trustees for the time being of our said corporation, shall, by majority of voices, nominate and choose another, or others of the members of our said corporation, in the place and stead of him or them so dying, removing, refusing or neglecting to act, within thirty days after such contingency; hereby giving and granting, that such person or persons as shall be so chosen and appointed from time to time, by the majority of the surviving trustees for the time being of our said corporation, shall have, hold, exercise and enjoy their said offices, from the time of such election and appointment, until the last Tuesday in April then next ensuing, and until other or others be legally chosen in his or their place or stead, as fully and amply as the person or persons, in whose place he or they shall be chosen, could or might have done by virtue of these presents; and we do hereby will and direct, that this method shall forever hereafter be used for filling up all vacancies in the said office of trustees, between the annual elections above directed: And further our royal will and pleasure is, and we do hereby, for us, our heirs, and successors, ordain and appoint, and give and grant to the trustees of *The New York Society Library*, and their successors, that any one of the trustees for the time being, shall and may, from time to time, as occasion may require, summon and call together at such times and places in our said city of New York, as they shall respectively think proper, the trustees of the said library and corporation for the time being, giving them at least one day's notice thereof: And we do hereby require them to meet accordingly; and give, grant and ordain, that any seven or more of the said trustees, being so convened together, shall forever hereafter be a legal meeting of the said corporation; and they, or the major part of them so met, shall have full power and authority to adjourn from day to day, or for any other time, as the business of our said corporation may require, and to do, execute, transact, manage and perform, in the name of our said corporation, all and every act and acts, thing and things whatsoever, which our said corporation are or shall, by virtue of these our letters patent, be authorized to do, act, transact, manage and perform, in as full and ample manner as if all and

every the trustees of our said corporation were present and consenting thereto: And further, we do hereby for us, our heirs and successors, ordain and appoint, and give and grant to the trustees of *The New York Society Library*, that at any and every such legal meeting of any seven or more of the trustees for the time being, of our said corporation, it shall and may be lawful for them, in writing, under the seal of our said corporation, to make, frame, constitute, establish and ordain, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, such laws, constitutions, ordinances, regulations and statutes, for the better government of the officers, members and servants of the said corporation; for regulating the terms upon which the books of the said library shall be lent out, both to members and others; for fixing and ascertaining the places of meeting of our said corporation, for the election of trustees, and the places of meeting of the trustees; for regulating the management and disposition of the books of the said library, and the moneys, funds and effects belonging to the said corporation; the transferring rights in the said library from one person to another; and all other the business and affairs whatsoever of our said corporation, as they or the major part of them, so legally met, shall judge best for the general good of the said corporation, and for the more effectual promoting, increasing and preserving the said library; and the same, or any of them, to alter, amend or repeal, from time to time, as they or the major part of them so met as aforesaid shall think proper; provided such laws, constitutions, regulations, ordinances and statutes be not repugnant to the laws of that part of our kingdom of Great Britain called England, nor of our province of New York. And, also, at any and every such legal meeting of any seven or more of the said trustees for the time being of our said corporation, it shall and may be lawful for them, or the majority of them so met as aforesaid, to nominate and appoint one of the members of the said corporation to be treasurer, and one other of the members of the said corporation to be secretary of the said corporation, and some other fit person or persons to be keeper or keepers of the said library; and from time to time to appoint them, the said treasurer, secretary and librarian, and

each of them, their respective powers, authorities, business, trusts and attendances, and to displace and discharge them, or any of them, and to appoint other or others in their places and stead. And further, it is our royal will and pleasure, and we do hereby, for us, our heirs and successors, will and ordain, and give and grant to the trustees of *The New York Society Library*, and their successors, forever, that it shall and may be lawful to and for each and every of the members for the time being of our said corporation, his and their executors, administrators and assigns, to give, sell, alien, assign, devise or dispose of their respective rights in the said library; and that their respective assigns shall be members of our said corporation, and be entitled to all and every the same rights and privileges in the said library, and in our said corporation, as the members hereby made are entitled to by virtue of these presents. *Provided always*, That a *part of a right* in the said library shall not entitle the proprietor or owner thereof to any privilege whatsoever in the said library or corporation: And, also, that all and every the original subscribers to the said library, or their assigns respectively, upon paying to the treasurer for the time being of the said corporation, for the use of the said library, the full arrears of the yearly sum of *ten shillings*, agreed by the said original subscription to be paid yearly; that then and from thenceforth, each of the persons so paying the said arrears, shall thereupon become members of the said corporation, and be entitled to all and every the same rights and privileges in the said library and corporation, as the members herein particularly named are entitled to by virtue of these presents: And further, that at any and every such legal meeting of any seven or more of the trustees for the time being of the said library, it shall and may be lawful for them, or the major part of them so met as aforesaid, to elect and choose, by the majority of their voices, and in such manner and form, and upon such terms and conditions as shall be directed, ordained and established for that purpose, by any of the said by-laws, statutes, constitutions or ordinances of the said corporation, and admit under the common seal of our said corporation, such and so many persons to be members of our said corporation as



they shall think beneficial to the said library; which members, so admitted, shall be entitled to have, hold and enjoy all and every the same rights and privileges as the members herein particularly named are entitled to by virtue of these presents. And likewise, we do will, ordain, direct and require, that each and every of the members for the time being of our said corporation, shall, on the first Tuesday in May next, and yearly, on the first Tuesday in May, in every year for ever hereafter, pay to the treasurer for the time being of the said corporation, the sum of *ten shillings*, current money of New York, for the use of the said library; and in case any of the said yearly sum of *ten shillings* shall at any time or times hereafter be in arrear and unpaid, by the space of thirty days next after any of the days on which the same ought to be paid, that then the person or persons from whom the same shall be due and payable, shall thereupon forfeit, and be utterly excluded from all his or their rights and privileges in and to the said library and corporation, but shall at any time within five years thereafter, upon payment of all the arrears due to the time of payment, be restored to his and their respective rights and privileges in the said library and corporation, as if no such forfeiture had happened: and lastly, we do by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors give and grant to the trustees of *The New York Society Library*, and their successors forever, that this our present charter shall be deemed, adjudged and construed, in all cases, most favorably, and for the best benefit and advantage of our said corporation; and that this our present grant, being entered on record, as is hereinafter expressed, shall be forever hereafter good and effectual in the law, according to our royal intent and meaning hereinbefore declared, and without any other license, grant or confirmation from us, our heirs or successors hereafter, by the said corporation to be had or obtained notwithstanding any mis-recitals, non-recitals, not naming or mis-naming of any the aforesaid offices, franchises, privileges, immunities, or other the premises, or any of them, and although no writ of *ad quod damnum*, or other writs, inquisitions or precepts, hath been upon this occasion had, made, issued or prosecuted; any statute, act, ordinance or provision or other matter

or thing to the contrary thereof in any wise notwithstanding. *In testimony whereof* we have caused these our letters to be made patent, and the great seal of our said province to be hereunto affixed, and the same to be entered on record in our secretary's office, for our said province of New York, in one of the books of patents there remaining. *Witness* our trusty and well-beloved William Tryon, Esq., our captain-general and governor-in-chief in and over our said province of New York and the territories depending thereon in America, chancellor and vice-admiral of the same, at our fort, in our city of New York, by and with the advice and consent of our council for our said province of New York, the ninth day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-two, and of our reign the thirteenth.

CLARKE.

WILLIAM TRYON.

Indorsed. New-York, Secretary's Office, 25th November, 1772. *The within Charter or Letters Patent is recorded in this Office, in Lib. Patents, No. 16, page 229, &c.* GW. BANYAR, D. Secy.

AN ACT TO REMOVE DOUBTS RESPECTING THE CHARTER GRANTED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.—PASSED FEBRUARY 18, 1789.

WHEREAS the operation of the charter granted to the members of *The New-York Society Library*, incorporating them by the name of *The Trustees of the New-York Society Library*, bearing date the ninth day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-two, was suspended during the war lately waged by the King of Great Britain against the United States of America: In order, therefore, to remove doubts respecting the said corporation,

*Be it enacted by the People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same,* That the said charter, and all and singular the estates, rights, powers, authorities, liberties, privi-

leges, franchises and immunities thereby granted, and which the said corporation and the members thereof did, or might lawfully hold, exercise and enjoy, on the nineteenth day of April, in the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, by virtue of the said charter, shall be, continue and enure in full force, virtue and efficacy, to all intents, constructions and purposes in the law whatsoever, notwithstanding any non-user or mis-user thereof, or any part thereof, between the eighteenth day of April, in the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, and the day of the passing of this act; and that the members of the said corporation, and their legal representatives under the said charter, and each of them, shall have, hold and enjoy, and be fully able and capable in the law to exercise all and singular the rights, powers and authorities to them belonging, by virtue or in consequence of the said charter, although the yearly sums which ought to have been paid by them, or any of them, according to the said charter, may be in arrear and unpaid; and all such yearly payments and sums as have become due and payable, and now remain in arrear and unpaid, are hereby remitted to the members of the said corporation; and that Robert R. Livingston, Henry Remsen, Robert Watts, Brockholst Livingston, Samuel Jones, Peter Keteltas, Walter Rutherford, Matthew Clarkson, Samuel Bard, Hugh Gaine, Daniel C. Verplanck and Edward Greswold, shall be, and hereby are declared and appointed the present Trustees of the said Library and corporation, and shall hold, possess and enjoy their said offices, until the last Tuesday in April now next ensuing, and until other fit persons shall be elected and chosen in their places, according to the said charter.

AN ACT TO ENABLE THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY TO INCREASE THE YEARLY SUMS PAYABLE ON THE SHARES OF THE SAID LIBRARY.—PASSED MARCH 8, 1802.

*Be it enacted by the People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, That it shall and may be lawful for the Trustees of The New-York Society Library, in the City*



of New-York, for the time being, on the first Tuesday of May next, and yearly on the first Tuesday of May in every year thereafter, to demand and receive from the members of the said Society, a sum not exceeding two dollars and fifty cents for each and every right or share in the said Library; and in case any of the said yearly sums of two dollars and fifty cents shall at any time thereafter be in arrear or unpaid for thirty days next after any of the days on which the same ought to have been paid, that then the person or persons from whom the same shall be due shall be subject to the like forfeiture of their rights and privileges in the said Library, as is mentioned and provided in the charter of the said Society.

AN ACT TO ENABLE THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY TO INCREASE THE YEARLY SUMS PAYABLE ON THE SHARES OF THE SAID LIBRARY.—PASSED MARCH 15, 1819.

*Be it enacted by the People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, That it shall and may be lawful for the Trustees of The New-York Society Library, in the City of New-York, for the time being, on the first Tuesday of May next, and yearly, on the first Tuesday of May in every year thereafter, to demand and receive from the members of the said Society the sum of one dollar and fifty cents, in addition to the sum of two dollars and fifty cents, which they are now authorized by law to demand and receive for each and every right or share in the said Library, making together the yearly sum of four dollars; and in case any of the yearly sums of four dollars shall at any time thereafter be in arrear and unpaid for thirty days next after any of the days on which the same ought to have been paid, that then the person or persons from whom the same shall be due shall be subject to the like forfeiture of his, her or their rights and privileges in the said Library, as is mentioned and provided in the charter of the said Society.*

AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK  
SOCIETY LIBRARY TO COMMUTE THEIR ANNUAL DUES.—  
PASSED MARCH 15, 1839.

The People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

§ 1. It shall and may be lawful for the Trustees of the New-York Society Library to commute or receive a sum in gross for or upon any rights or shares now held or hereafter to be held in the said Society, in lieu of the payment of the annual dues thereon; but the sum for which the annual payments upon any such rights or share[s] shall be commuted shall not be less than sixty-seven dollars.

§ 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

AN ACT IN RELATION TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEW-YORK  
SOCIETY LIBRARY.—PASSED MARCH 29, 1841, BY A TWO-  
THIRD VOTE.

The People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

§ 1. It shall be lawful for the members of the New-York Society Library, on the last Tuesday of April in each and every year after the passage of this law, to elect fifteen Trustees of the said Library, and the number of the Trustees of the said Library shall be fifteen instead of twelve, upon and immediately after the election which shall be next held.

§ 2. From and immediately after such election, eight instead of seven shall be a quorum of the Trustees of the said New-York Society Library for the transaction of business. The mode of filling vacancies and all other matters in relation to the election and tenure of office of the said Trustees, shall remain as the same are now provided for in the charter of the said Library.

§ 3. This act shall take effect immediately on its passage.

AN ACT TO INCREASE THE ANNUAL PAYMENTS ON THE SHARES  
OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY.—PASSED MARCH 24,  
1842.

The People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

§ 1. The Trustees of the New-York Society Library are hereby authorized to demand and receive from the members of the said Society on the first Tuesday of every May hereafter the sum of two dollars, in addition to the sum which they are now authorized to demand and receive, upon each and every right or share in the said Library, and the said Trustees shall have the same powers and remedies for the collection of the said additional sum, by forfeiture of the shares or otherwise, as they now have for the collection of the annual payment which they are authorized to demand and receive as aforesaid.

§ 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

AN ACT CONCERNING THE TITLE OF "THE TRUSTEES OF THE  
NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY" TO CERTAIN REAL ESTATE IN  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK.—PASSED FEBRUARY 14, 1843, BY A  
TWO-THIRD VOTE.

The People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

§ 1. The title of "The Trustees of the New-York Society Library" to the two lots of ground in the City of New-York, on which their Library stands, bounded westwardly in front by Broadway, eastwardly in the rear by land now or late of Ebenezer Clark, southwardly by Catharine Lane, and northwardly by Leonard Street (one of which lots was conveyed to the said Trustees by Ebenezer Clark and wife, by deed bearing date the thirtieth day of April, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six, and the other of which lots was conveyed to the



said Trustees by "The New-York Athenæum," by deed bearing date the sixteenth day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight), is hereby confirmed to the said "The Trustees of the New-York Society Library," their successors and assigns forever, to the same extent only as if there were no conditions, prohibitions, limitations or restrictions in the charter of said corporation, as to the yearly or total value or amount of the real estate to be held by the said Trustees or their successors.

§ 2. It shall and may be lawful for the said corporation to mortgage the real estate in this act described, or any part thereof, in fee simple or for any less estate, to any person or persons, and for such consideration as to the said Trustees shall appear expedient.

§ 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

AN ACT TO INCREASE THE ANNUAL PAYMENTS ON THE SHARES OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, AND TO AUTHORIZE THE TRUSTEES OF THE SAID SOCIETY TO COMMUTE THEIR ANNUAL DUES.—PASSED APRIL 3, 1866; THREE-FIFTHS BEING PRESENT.

The People of the State of New-York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

§ 1. The Trustees of the *New-York Society Library* are hereby authorized to demand and receive from the members of the said Society, on the first Tuesday of every May hereafter, the sum of four dollars, and in addition to any sum which they are now authorized to demand and receive upon each and every right or share in said Library; and the said Trustees shall have the same powers and remedies for the collection of said additional sum by forfeiture or otherwise, as they now have for the collection of the annual payments which they are authorized to demand and receive as aforesaid.

§ 2. It shall be lawful for the Trustees of the said Society to commute and receive a sum in gross for or upon any right or

share now held, or hereafter to be held, in the said Society, in lieu of the payment of the annual dues thereon; but the sum for which the annual payments upon any such right or share shall be commuted shall not be less than one hundred and twenty-five dollars for annual payments of ten dollars, and in that ratio for lesser annual payments.

§ 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

### III

## TRUSTEES OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, 1754-1908

(Where no month is given, the regular election in April is to be understood.)

James De Lancey, 1754-55, 1756-57  
Joseph Murray, 1754-55, 1756-57  
John Chambers, 1754-55, 1756-57  
Henry Barclay, 1754-55, 1756-57  
William Walton, 1754-57  
John Watts, Sr., 1754-55, 1756-76  
James Alexander, 1754-55  
Robert R. Livingston, Sr., 1754-56, 1757-73  
Benjamin Nicoll, 1754-55, 1756-60  
William Livingston, 1754-56, 1757-73  
William Alexander (Lord Stirling), 1754-56  
William Peartree Smith, 1754-56, 1757-60  
William Smith, Sr., 1755-56  
Philip Livingston, 1755-56  
Peter Van Brugh Livingston, 1755-56, 1757-76  
John Livingston, 1755-57  
William Smith, Jr., 1755-56, 1757-76  
John Vanderspiegel, 1755-56, 1757-71 (d. Feb.)  
John Morin Scott, 1755-56  
Oliver De Lancey, 1756-57  
Henry Cruger, 1756-57  
David Clarkson, 1756-74  
Gabriel Ludlow, 1756-70  
Peter Keteltas, 1757-76, (Dec.) 1788-89  
Goldsbrow Banyar, 1757-65, (Feb.) 1771-76



John Bard, 1760-69  
Whitehead Hicks, 1760-74  
Walter Rutherford, 1765-76, (Dec.) 1788-91, 1799-1800  
Samuel Bard, 1769-76, (Dec.) 1788-93, 1796 (Mch.-Apl.)  
Samuel Jones, 1770-76, (Dec.) 1788-97  
Robert R. Livingston, Jr., 1773-74, (Dec.) 1788-93  
Samuel Verplanck, 1773-76  
John Jones, 1774-76  
John Tabor Kempe, 1774-76  
Peter Van Schaack, 1774-76  
Robert Watts, (Dec.) 1788-91  
Brockholst Livingston, (Dec.) 1788-96  
Matthew Clarkson, (Dec.) 1788-90, 1798-1810  
Hugh Gaine, (Dec.) 1788-1807  
Daniel Crommelin Verplanck, (Dec.) 1788-92  
Edward Greswold, (Dec.) 1788-91  
Henry Remsen, (Dec.) 1788-90  
Gulian Verplanck, 1789-91  
John Pintard, 1790-92, 1809-17  
Jacob Morton, 1790-95  
Frederick William Augustus, Baron Steuben, 1791-92  
Benjamin Moore, 1791-92, 1797-1811  
Nathaniel Hazard, 1791-94  
John Cozine, 1791-98  
John Blagge, 1791 (Apl.-Aug.)  
Rufus King, (Aug.) 1791-92  
Israel Wilkes, 1792-93  
Francis Childs, 1792-93  
William Samuel Johnson, 1792-1801  
Charles Wilkes, 1793-94, (Dec.) 1798-1824  
Edward Livingston, 1792-95  
James Miles Hughes, 1793-94  
David Van Horne, 1793-96  
Samuel Latham Mitchill, 1793-95, 1805-10  
Richard Varick, 1794-96  
William Linn, 1794-1805  
John Kemp, 1794-1812 (d. Nov.)  
William Denning, 1795-1810

- Daniel Phoenix, 1795-1809  
William Pitt Smith, 1795-96 (d. Feb.)  
James Kent, 1796-98  
Thomas Eddy, 1796-97  
William Laight, 1796-98  
Thomas Jones, 1796-98 (d. Dec.)  
William Johnson, 1797-1817  
John Henry Livingston, 1798-99  
Peter Wilson, (Dec.) 1798-1814  
John Mitchell Mason, 1800-03  
Daniel McCormick, 1801-11  
Egbert Benson, 1803-16  
John Stevens, 1807-09  
Edward William Laight, 1809-39  
Peter Augustus Jay, 1810-17  
Anthony Bleecker, 1810-27 (d. Mch.)  
Gulian Crommelin Verplanck, 1810-17, (Nov.) 1817-55,  
1857-70 (d. Mch.)  
Clement Clarke Moore, 1811-16, 1817-24  
John Henry Hobart, 1811-30 (d. Sept.)  
John Richardson Bayard Rodgers, (Dec.) 1812-21  
John Augustine Smith, 1814-15, (Apl.) 1827-34, 1836-37  
Samuel Farmar Jarvis, 1815-20 (res. Oct.)  
John Jordan Morgan, 1816-38  
John Ferguson, 1816-32 (d. July)  
David Samuel Jones, 1817-33, 1834-36  
Charles Drake, 1817-32  
Wright Post, 1817 (decl'd)  
James Renwick, (Nov.) 1820-34  
John Kearney Rodgers, 1821-37  
John Le Conte, 1824-26 (res. May), (Nov.) 1830-33,  
1834-36  
Ezra Weeks, 1824-33  
Evert Abraham Bancker, (May) 1826-37, 1838-45  
Charles Baldwin, 1832-34 (d. July)  
James Campbell, (Nov.) 1832-37  
John Frederick Schroeder, 1833-34  
Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright, 1833-34 (res. Jan.)

- James Ellsworth DeKay, 1833-34  
Stephen Clay Williams, (Jan.-Apl.) 1834, (June) 1840-50,  
(Apl.) 1852-55, (Mch.) 1877-85 (res. Nov.)  
William Berrian, 1834-37  
John Anthon, 1834-37  
Henry James Anderson, 1834-37, (Nov.) 1850-55  
Enos Thompson Throop, (July) 1834-35, 1836-37  
Washington Irving, 1835-37  
William Henry Harison, 1837-42 (res. May)  
Andrew Hamersley, 1837-38  
William Samuel Johnson, 1837-40  
Charles Goadsby Ferris, 1837-38  
John Richard Townsend, 1837-38, 1840 (decl'd),  
1845-46 (d. Mch.)  
William Inglis, 1837-55  
William Anson Lawrence, 1837-41 (res. Jan.)  
Edgar Evertson, 1837-38 (d. Apl.)  
Daniel Embury, 1837 (decl'd)  
Henry Nicoll, (Sept.) 1837-38, (Jan.) 1843-46  
Nathaniel Fish Moore, 1838-39 (res. July)  
Charles Alexander Clinton, 1838-40  
William Kent, 1838-39  
Daniel Seymour, 1838-43, (Nov.) 1846-50 (d. June)  
Alexander Robertson Rodgers, 1838-55  
Henry Brevoort, Jr., 1839-40  
Rufus Lathrop Lord, 1839-40  
Dayton Hobart, (Dec.) 1839-55  
Anthony Barclay, 1840-42 (res. Sept.)  
Peter Augustus Schermerhorn, 1840-41 (res. June)  
Frederic De Peyster, 1840-55, 1869-82 (d. Aug.)  
James De Peyster Ogden, (Mch.) 1841-55  
Augustus Fleming, 1841-42 (res. June)  
Joshua Coit, 1841-55  
Benjamin Isaac Haight, 1841-46  
Robert Bowne Minturn, (June) 1841-45 (res. June)  
Joseph Delafield, (June) 1842-55  
James Isaac Jones, (Sept.) 1842 (res. Oct.)  
Joseph Green Cogswell, (Jan.) 1843-48 (res. Oct.)



- Jacob Harvey, 1843-48 (d. Nov.)  
John Hamilton Gourlie, (Oct.) 1845-47, (Nov.) 1848-55  
Orville Dewey, 1846 (res. Nov.)  
James Henry Titus, 1846-55  
Charles Mortimer Leupp, 1846-55  
Charles Astor Bristed, 1847-53  
Jonathan Sturges, (Dec.) 1848-49 (res. Mch.)  
James William Beekman, Sr., 1849-55, (June) 1857-59  
William Templeton Johnson, 1850-52 (res. Jan.)  
Edward Jones, 1853-54  
John Bigelow, 1854-55  
Charles Edward Anderson, 1855-56 (res. Oct.)  
George Templeton Strong, 1855 (decl'd)  
George James Cornell, 1855 (res. Dec.)  
Charles Richard Swords, 1855-76 (res. Jan.)  
Henry Rogers Winthrop, 1855 (decl'd)  
George Richard James Bowdoin, 1855 (res. Oct.)  
Jacob Post Giraud Foster, 1855-58  
Oliver Wolcott Gibbs, 1855-58  
George Gilfert Waters, 1855 (decl'd)  
Jacob Harsen, 1855 (res. June)  
Robert Clarkson Goodhue, 1855 (decl'd)  
Cornelius Du Bois, 1855-56 (res. Feb.)  
Henry Van Schaick, 1855-58  
William Henry Anthon, 1855-59  
Martin Ryerson Zabriskie, 1855 (res. July)  
George Christian Anthon, (May) 1855-58  
Charles Edward Strong, (May) 1855-57,  
(May) 1857-97 (d. Oct.)  
Benjamin Hazard Field, (May) 1855-57 (res. May)  
Robert Le Roy, (May) 1855-58  
Robert Kelly, (June) 1855-56 (d. Apl.)  
Otis Dwight Swan, (July) 1855-77 ("displaced" Jan.)  
George Thomson Elliot, Jr., (Oct.) 1855-58 (res. Mch.)  
William Adams, (Dec.) 1855-76 (d. Feb.)  
Lewis Colford Jones, (Feb.) 1856-57 (res. Oct.)  
Robert Lenox Kennedy, 1856-87 (d. Sept.)  
William Jones Hoppin, (Dec.) 1856-77

- John Romeyn Brodhead, 1858-71  
George Folsom, 1858-62  
James Paine Cronkhite, 1858-59  
Thomas Ward, 1858-73 (d. Apl.)  
Henry Crawford Dorr, 1858-83  
William Allen Butler, 1858-71  
Stacy Budd Collins, 1859-71 (res. Mch.)  
Evert Augustus Duyckinck, 1859-78 (d. Aug.)  
William McMurray, 1859-68 (d. June)  
Thomas W. Clerke, 1862-71 (res. Mch.)  
John Lambert Cadwalader, (Mch.) 1870-74 (res. Oct.)  
Frederick Sheldon, 1871-1907 (d. Nov.)  
Edgar Simeon Van Winkle, 1871-73 (res. Mch.)  
Edward Schell, 1871-94 (d. Jan.)  
Stephen Payne Nash, 1871-84 (res. Dec.)  
Henry Drisler, (Mch.) 1873-97 (d. Nov.)  
Richard Edwards Mount, 1873-80 (d. Mch.)  
Frederic James de Peyster, (Oct.) 1874-1905 (d. May)  
Francis Aquila Stout, (Feb.) 1876-92 (d. Dec.)  
Richard Tylden Auchmuty, (Apl.) 1876-93 (d. Dec.)  
Adam Tredwell Sackett, 1877-78 (d. Dec.)  
John Mason Knox, (Jan.) 1879-94 (d. Mch.)  
George Cabot Ward, (Jan.) 1879-86 ("retired" Mch.)  
James Monroe McLean, 1880-90 (d. May)  
Johnston Livingston de Peyster, (Dec.) 1882-1903 (d. May)  
George Van Nest Baldwin, 1883-1908 (d. Feb.)  
Edward King, (Jan.) 1885-1906 (res. Oct.)  
Albert Mathews, (Nov.) 1885-1901 (res. May)  
James William Beekman (Jr.), (Mch.) 1886-96 (res. Nov.),  
(Dec.) 1905-08 (d. Aug.)  
Henry Augustus Cram, 1888-94 (d. Apl.)  
John Andrew Hardenbergh, (Feb.) 1891-98 (d. Mch.)  
Charles Boyd Curtis, (Dec.) 1892-1905 (d. Mch.)  
Frederick Augustus Schermerhorn, (Mch.) 1894-  
Robert Fulton Cutting, (Mch.) 1894-96 (res. Nov.)  
Charles Henry Marshall, (Mch.) 1894-  
Frederic de Peyster Foster, 1894-  
David Maitland Armstrong, (Mch.) 1897-

Charles Coolidge Haight, (Mch.) 1897-  
Archibald Douglas Russell, (Jan.) 1898-  
Alfred Pell, (Jan.) 1898-1901 (d. Mch.)  
George Winthrop Folsom, (Apl.) 1898-  
Beverly Chew, (Apl.) 1901-  
Henry Cotheal Swords, (Nov.) 1901-  
Timothy Matlack Cheesman, (Mch.) 1904-  
Jacob Harsen Purdy, (Apl.) 1905 (res. Nov.)  
Stiles Franklin Stanton, (Apl.) 1906-07 (d. June)  
David B. Ogden, (Apl.) 1907-  
William Emlen Roosevelt, 1908-  
Howard Townsend, 1908-  
Bayard Tuckerman, 1908-



# IV

## OFFICERS OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY, 1754-1908

### *Chairmen*<sup>1</sup>

|                                   |                      |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Robert Kelly .....                | Jan.-Apl., 1856      |
| Charles Edward Anderson ..        | May-Oct., 1856       |
| Charles Richard Swords .....      | Feb., 1857-58, May   |
| Gulian Crommelin Verplanck .....  | May, 1858-70, Mch.   |
| Frederic de Peyster .....         | Mch., 1870-82, Aug.  |
| Robert Lenox Kennedy .....        | Oct., 1882-83, May   |
| Charles Edward Strong .....       | May, 1883-85, May    |
| Frederick Sheldon .....           | { May-Nov., 1885     |
|                                   | May, 1892-94, Nov.   |
| Henry Drisler .....               | Nov., 1885-87, May   |
| John Mason Knox .....             | May, 1887-90, May    |
| Frederic James de Peyster .....   | May, 1890-92, May    |
| George Van Nest Baldwin .....     | Nov., 1894-98, May   |
| Johnston Livingston de Peyster .. | May, 1898-1900, Dec. |
| Edward King .....                 | { Dec., 1900-03, May |
|                                   | May, 1905-06, May    |
| Charles Boyd Curtis .....         | May, 1903-05, Mch.   |
| F. Augustus Schermerhorn .....    | { Apl.-May, 1905     |
|                                   | May, 1906-07, May    |
| Frederic de Peyster Foster .....  | May, 1907-           |

<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1856 a Chairman was appointed at each meeting.

*Treasurers*

|                                  |                                               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| John Watts .....                 | May, 1754-55, June                            |
| John Morin Scott .....           | June, 1755-56, Nov.                           |
| Gabriel Ludlow .....             | Nov., 1756-57, May                            |
| David Clarkson .....             |                                               |
| William Peartree Smith .....     | May, 1757-58, Mch.                            |
| John Vanderspiegel .....         | Mch., 1758-71, Feb.                           |
| Samuel Jones .....               | { Feb., 1771-76, Sept.<br>Dec., 1788-96, Jan. |
| Daniel Phoenix .....             | Jan., 1796-1810, May                          |
| Edward William Laight .....      | May, 1810-26, May                             |
| John Jordan Morgan .....         | May, 1826-38, May                             |
| William Henry Harison .....      | May, 1838-42, May                             |
| Alexander Robertson Rodgers .... | June, 1842-55, May                            |
| Charles Edward Strong .....      | May, 1855-59, May                             |
| Otis Dwight Swan .....           | May, 1859-77, Jan.                            |
| Richard Edwards Mount .....      | Feb., 1877-80, Mch.                           |
| Edward Schell .....              | May, 1880-94, Jan.                            |
| John Andrew Hardenbergh .....    | Jan., 1894-98, Mch.                           |
| Archibald Douglas Russell .....  | Apl., 1898-99, May                            |
| Frederic de Peyster Foster ..... | May, 1899-1907, May                           |
| Henry Cotheal Swords .....       | May, 1907-                                    |

*Secretaries<sup>1</sup>*

|                              |                                             |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| William Peartree Smith ..... | { May, 1754-56, May<br>May, 1757-58, Mch.   |
| Gabriel Ludlow .....         | Nov., 1756-57, May                          |
| John Vanderspiegel .....     | Mch., 1758-69, May                          |
| Samuel Bard .....            | { May, 1769-76, Sept.<br>Dec., 1788-89, May |
| Edward Greswold .....        | May, 1789-91, May                           |
| Jacob Morton .....           | May, 1791-92, May                           |
| Isaac Leonard Kip .....      | May, 1792-94, May                           |

<sup>1</sup> Styled "Clerks" until 1772.

|                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| John Forbes .....               | June, 1794-1815, Apl. |
| John Pintard .....              | Apl., 1815-16, Apl.   |
| Anthony Bleecker .....          | Apl., 1816-27, Mch.   |
| Evert Abraham Bancker .....     | Apl., 1827-37, May    |
| William Inglis .....            | May, 1837-55, May     |
| George Christian Anthon .....   | May, 1855-56, May     |
| Henry Van Schaick .....         | May, 1856-57, Apl.    |
| William Jones Hoppin .....      | Apl., 1857-77, Apl.   |
| Frederic James de Peyster ..... | May, 1877-80, Feb.    |
| John Mason Knox .....           | May, 1880-83, May     |
| George Van Nest Baldwin .....   | May, 1883-94, Nov.    |
| Charles Boyd Curtis .....       | Nov., 1894-1903, May  |
| Beverly Chew .....              | May, 1903-            |

### *Librarians*

|                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| John Morin Scott, acting .....  | June, 1755-56, May    |
| George Duncan Ludlow, acting .. | Nov., 1756-57, May    |
| Benjamin Hildreth .....         | May, 1757-65, Sept.   |
| Thomas Jackson .....            | Sept., 1765-68, May   |
| James Wilmot .....              | May, 1768-74, May     |
| George Murray .....             | June, 1774-76, Sept.  |
| George Wright .....             | Jan., 1789-90, Jan.   |
| Isaac Leonard Kip .....         | Jan., 1790-94, May    |
| John P. Pearss .....            | May-June, 1794        |
| John Forbes .....               | June, 1794-1824, Oct. |
| Burtis Skidmore .....           | Nov., 1824-28, May    |
| Philip Jones Forbes .....       | May, 1828-55, May     |
| John MacMullen .....            | June, 1855-57, May    |
| Wentworth Sanborn Butler .....  | Oct., 1857-95, Oct.   |
| Frank Barna Bigelow .....       | Oct., 1895-           |

### *Librarian Emeritus*

|                                |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Wentworth Sanborn Butler ..... | Oct., 1895- |
|--------------------------------|-------------|



# V

## BENEFACTORS OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

|                                 |      |                        |
|---------------------------------|------|------------------------|
| Elizabeth Demilt .....          | 1850 | \$5,000.00             |
| Estate of John Cleve Green..... | 1877 | 50,000.00              |
| George B. Dorr.....             | 1877 | 5,000.00               |
| Robert Lenox Kennedy.....       | 1878 | 10,000.00 <sup>1</sup> |
| George J. Foster.....           | 1878 | 3,000.00               |
| Richard Edwards Mount.....      | 1880 | 1,000.00               |
| Mary Matilda (Drake) Keese..... | 1880 | 12,000.00              |
| F. Augustus Schermerhorn.....   | 1898 | 15,000.00 <sup>2</sup> |
| Maria Branson Mount.....        | 1901 | 1,000.00               |
| Charles Henry Contoit.....      | 1903 | 142,586.68             |
|                                 |      | <hr/> \$244,586.68     |

<sup>1</sup> Expended for the decoration and nucleus of the Green Art Alcoves.

<sup>2</sup> Devoted to recataloguing the

Library collections and to the introduction of the card catalogue system.

## VI

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